

# 教室

01

《花園》のリリース

竹町

illustration

トマリ

SPY ROOM

the room is a specialized information room  
code name hanazono



ファンタジア文庫



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# Illustrations



《花園》のリリース

# スパイ教室

01







SPY ROOM  
the room is a specialized institution of mission impossible  
code name hanazono

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C O N T E N S

# Prologue

Guido stood in front of a certain man's room. There existed a spy team called [Homura<sup>1</sup>], and Guido made that man the one responsible for it. The team was filled with odd fellows, but his inconsiderate and almost selfish attitude stood out even in the midst of them all, whilst the relatively rational Guido left the command to such man.

—Well, that's to be expected, Guido sighed to himself.

After all, he was the one who picked up that man. He took the young orphan under his wing, raising him to be a first-rate spy. Though he certainly hadn't expected him to grow up to be such an impactful existence.

The man just shut himself in his room. Coming out for neither breakfast nor lunch, he would not even set foot outside to visit the toilet. Wondering what he was up to in an exasperated manner, Guido knocked on the door. After not seeing any response for five seconds he decided on the least bothersome route of simply opening the door.

Gazing around the changed room, he was flabbergasted. The white wallpaper and red carpet—were both died in a crimson red. Liquid not unlike fresh blood was splashed around the interior of the room, even dirtying the bed and closets. It looked like a murder scene so grotesque that even the seasoned Guido had trouble holding back a scream. The Kagerou<sup>2</sup> Palace, the formerly beautiful western-style room, had turned into a gruesome location.

An enormous canvas stood right in the center of the room, with a man standing in front of it. With a vacant expression, he gazed down at it.

"Marvelous—"

As if to strike down the canvas, he swung the painting brush, coloring the canvas and carpet, as well as Guido's face itself. Following that, maybe realizing something was off, he turned around with an intrigued *Hm?*.

"...Teacher, do you have some business with me?"

"What happened with you?"

"I just had the sudden urge to draw something. Teacher, could you buy me the paint I'm lacking?"

"...You sure work your teacher hard, huh."

—I came here for some serious business, so don't pull any idiotic crap on me, Guido hissed.

Well, rather than acting like an idiot, he might simply be one.

"A special mission. You will be separated from the team starting tomorrow, working solo for a while."

"Special...?"

Guido moved on to explain the details. The more he went on, the more the facial expression of the man started to change. The order he received was so harsh it would have had any other spy burst out in rage. Even Guido immediately declined despite being highly skilled himself. It was similar to telling one to throw their life away.

"Even you should have less than 10% of a success chance on this. If you fail, you die. Can you do it?"

"I accept—if that is your order, Teacher."

An immediate answer. Expecting a refusal, Guido was left dumbfounded. Meanwhile, the man ran the painting brush across the canvas yet again, coloring it red. Bowing his head in assent with a *This should be enough for today*, he met gaze with Guido.

"Teacher, I will leave behind a will if there ever comes a time I deem it necessary. Everything I have today is because of you. You picked me up back when I was an orphan and raised me into what I am now. My gratitude towards the boss is inexhaustible, and it wouldn't be an overstatement to say I love the members of [Homura]. I don't know my real family, but I consider all of you to be one. And my family members have their own friends, lovers, and relatives. If adding all of them up together results in taking up this entire country, then I deeply love this country."

"Don't you feel like wanting to run away...?"

"Not in the slightest."

Guido sighed. How pleasant it would have been if the man declined right there.

"Hey, stupid disciple, once this mission is over, how about you give yourself a title."

"What is a spy supposed to do with a title?"

Quite the unexpected and reasonable doubt, but Guido ignored him.

"[The world's strongest spy], how about it?"

What a childish naming sense he had. However, the other party unexpectedly enjoyed it.

"Marvelous—"

The departure would happen immediately. The man put away the brush, putting on his suit, setting up his weapons inside. A wrist clock, hidden wire used for strangulation, a fountain pen with a voice recorder, a razor inside the collar and long needles hidden in his sleeves. After the man's preparation ended in less than five minutes, Guido exhaled his words.

"Off you go."

The man's eyes opened wide. He seemed to have been caught off guard by these words he didn't hear often.

"—I'm going."



The relationship between them partially opened up, the man having a slightly bashful smile.



1 Written as Flame, blaze

2 Written as Heat haze

# Chapter 1: Threat

The world was filled with pain and suffering—

All that was left in the world after history's greatest large-scale war was absurd agony, and countless wounds. Through this event known as the World War, which resulted in the capitulation of the Galgardo Empire and casualties of over ten million if you only counted the winning countries. In other words, it was a war without a winner.

Most of the victims were simple citizens. This was a special trait of this world war. Wars weren't fought with swords and arrows anymore. Scientific research and progress allowing for more and more dangerous and effective weapons had been made in recent years. Small machine guns, poison gas, anti-personnel landmines—in other words, weaponry much too gruesome was used to kill other people. Especially in the final stages of the war with both sides eventually losing their reason and humanity, which was followed by indiscriminate slaughter, the victims being helpless women and children. After the war came to an end, the politicians in the world became aware of the aftermath, and came to the conclusion—The cost of performance was more harmful than useful. War was but one kind of diplomacy measure. If there was another measure to choose, that would resolve everything.

In order to gain mining rights for oil and such, why wage war of all things. Executing a contract with the hostile country's politicians through tricks and deceiving had a much higher efficiency. They had countless other methods to use. Taking the family hostage to threaten them, promising money and a safe place to stay, or just offering women fitting of their desires, everything was possible. As long as the eyesore of a politician would disappear from the media, it would be a success, even if it had to be done through a scandal. Assassination as well. Losing one important politician was still better than sacrificing thousands of citizens, only to barely gain anything through waging war again. Peace could reign only officially.

Hence, peace terms were brought into action throughout the world, and international institutions creeding the peace were established. At the very first meeting, the heads of the biggest countries were gathered, shaking hands with beaming smiles.

Thus, the curtains were lowered on the [War waged in Light]. What followed was a war of information, waged by spies—the [War waged in Shadows].

The Republic of Deen had been one of the suffering countries during, and after the World War. It was a rather desolate rural country, originally unrelated to the waging war. Having been left during the Industrial Revolution and industrialization, it continued to cultivate crops and agricultural products of high quality. No political force to govern the colony, yet not nearly enough value to make it worth invading and conquering it. That being said, at that time, after being adjoined to the expanding Galgado Empire, they received a one-sided invasion, turning them into a victim with no benefits, with countless casualties. After the war ended, they abided by the following peace regulations, but started to educate spies to come out as a victor in the continuously fought [War waged in Shadows].

Spending more than ten years, spy education facilities had been built up all over the country. Scouts roaming through the lands guided children showing promise to these, separating them from their families and friends without any remorse. The inexperienced spies were the new evil. The education facilities and schools offered, or rather, forced them through intense and severe training, whittling down the number of graduates immensely. There were even deceased during the horrible graduation examination—

“Eh, I can graduate? Without taking any exam? Yay!”

That day, an exception was born. Having called the girl to his office in the educational institution, the chief director let out a sigh.

“It is just an interim, not an actual graduation.”

“But, I can work now as a fully-fledged spy, right? Me, who was not making the grade, a failure of a spy!”

“That’s...Well, you’re right.”

Wondering why this girl of all people, the chief director gazed down at the papers in his hands. Her name, Lily, seventeen years old. Boasting with favorable grades during the written exam, owner of a certain idiosyncrasy. However, the practical exam showed her catastrophic value. Repeating the same major mistakes every single time, she still somehow managed to barely avoid failing the school. The responsible instructor for her judged that the next practical exam would most likely lead to her dismissal.

Guessing that made some outside force highly evaluate her, the chief director once again took a closer look at Lily. Glossy silver hair, with lovable facial features, a quite emphasized bust, even under the uniform she was currently wearing. Though she was a bit too young with her seventeen years for him, a lot of men he knew preferred an age range like hers. She was an existence to lure in and entrance men. In other words, a honey trap.

“...Are you specialized in seductive techniques?”

“Eh, f-fueeeh? Not happening! I’m bad with perverted things!”

“Quite the fatal flaw for a female spy...”

“Don’t ask for the impossible...Eh, wait, don’t tell me my mission is...”

“No.”



"Ahhh, thank god," Lily sighed in relief.

Following that, the chief director sighed in unison. Maybe the other person knew of this disastrous scene, making this the reason Lily was chosen.

"I say wrong, but in the sense I haven't heard the details myself," the director threw a glare at Lily. "Do you understand what I mean with 'Impassable Mission'?"

Lily put one hand on her mouth.

"Umm...an alias for a mission a betheren has failed at before?"

"Exactly," the chief director snapped his fingers. "A mission which previously ended up in failure by the attempt of a fellow spy or soldier. In other words, a mission that was regarded as difficult, and even more so now that someone previously failed at it—Hence, the 'Impassable Mission'."

"Okay..."

"And apparently, this mission will be attempted by a team of professionals."

"Eh" Lily's eyes opened wide.

In response, the chief director nodded along, showing equal astonishment. In the event that a mission once having ended in failure would be challenged again, the difficulty of such was heightened exponentially. The target was now aware of the impending danger, the range of possible methods to use was now heavily limited. On top of that, information of the failure would be leaked to the outside. Do not attempt an Impassable Mission—that is this current world's common sense. Not to mention it would be attempted by a team of professionals this time.

"The name of the team is [Tomoshibi<sup>1</sup>]<sup>1</sup>—the team you were assigned to."

Lily's face froze up. Dropping his tone of voice, the chief director provided further detail.

"Let me be straight with you. You truly have potential. An exceptionally beautiful face and beauty, that idiosyncrasy, as well as the attitude to diligently take classes. I can see a potential future."

"Fufu, it's been awhile since I was praised like that."

"In other words, you don't have any other virtues besides such."

"....."

"The institution judged you to be a failure of a student, about to be dismissed. With no ill-will intended here, the result of the evaluation conducted by our excellent training staff says you have no skill as a spy. I cannot see you succeed in this terrifyingly dangerous and almost impossible mission. An Impassable Mission has a clear rate of only 10% for the most proficient spy, and the mortality rate runs up to 90%."

"Mortality rate 90%..."

"Lily, will you still join [Tomoshibi]?"

His evaluation and doubt was rectified. The girl had brought nothing but mistakes onto the missions she worked at during the training. One month ago during the practical exam, she dropped her gun in front of the target. Four months ago during the practical exam, she lost her way, barely managing to clear it in the set time-limit. Seven months ago, she flushed the

password down the toilet. In other words, she was an existence only passing the exam under great stress.

With all this background knowledge, the chief director couldn't help but feel guilt, basically sending the girl off to her pointless death.

"...You're saying this out of good will, aren't you?" Lily dropped her gaze.

"I don't want to kill a student I'm responsible for."

Of course, the chief director had close to no say in this. The mission came from an even higher institution than the educational facility he was responsible for. However, if the person herself decided to turn it down, there might be still another way—

"I will join [Tomoshibi]. Running away is not something I can allow myself."

The girl proudly announced. "Codename [Hanazono<sup>2</sup>], I step forth with determination to lay down my life!"

Just as the girl stated, determination filled her beautiful eyes. Seeing this, the chief director judged she should be fine, and was satisfied.

"Just kidding~ I'm not in it to die just yet~" Lily stuck out her tongue.

At the incinerator of the dorm, the girl mumbled words to herself.

Continuously throwing private property into the burning fire, she removed all traces of her ever having attended this facility. Watching the smoke rise up into the air, the girl puffed out her chest with a confident snort.

"A simple deduction. An Impassable Mission attempted by a team of professionals. No mistaking it, it's a gathering of the elite. Much, much safer than a team of average spies. I can already see the success! Well, no matter how much I try to hide my skill, people will still see through it, I guess~"

The fellow students of the girl had already experienced this to a certain degree, but the girl had quite the personality. Not paying any mind to the anxiety of the chief director, she was merely thinking about the interim graduation.

—I can become a member of an elite team! And, I can get a crazy amount of salary!

With just these merits in mind, Lily was in great spirits, as she gleefully burned all the notes and exam papers she had worked on, screaming *Burn strong, my youth!*—The trash in her dorm room had gathered quite a lot after these eight years. As these trash bags flew into the sky as scorching smoke, a certain written document entered her view.

'Taking the number of students and future prospects into account, you will pass this time.'

It was a notice cramped in the deep, lower parts of one trash bag. Without hesitation, she crunched it in her hands to make it as a ball, and curved it into the incinerator. She had received the same notice ten times in a row. Future prospects—the words Lily heard countless times thus far. With the talent she apparently had, she continued to stay at the school. But, when would that talent eventually bloom? How many years as a normal person would she have to spend? How many times would she be met by contempt?

“Still, I’ll definitely pull it off...”

She’ll burn away all the hardships and frustration she had to taste.

“I will develop my own skill in the rows of the elite. Goodbye, my alma mater!”

Finishing the garbage collection of the dorm room, she departed from the educational institution. A shame, but she had no time to say her goodbyes to her colleagues. On top of that, seeing the empty room of hers, they would only assume she was finally dismissed, not giving it any deeper thoughts. Riding a bus and a long-distance train she had never used before, it took an entire day—

She finally arrived at a certain seaport. In the Republic of Deen, it was the third largest city. Not too far from the capital, it was the city regarded as the entrance to the wide open sea. Stepping down from the train, brickwork buildings were lined up next to the other, forcing a sigh of admiration out of Lily. Stalls selling flowers and newspapers were mixed as she passed, arriving at the building she was instructed to arrive at. At the street with white collar<sup>3</sup> salarymen passing, it was between a clockwork shop, and a paint shop, a normal two-floor building with the name ‘Religious School Garmas’.

A man who seemed to have the function of a receptionist was smoking a cigarette near the entrance. Mustering up her courage, Lily moved over to tell him *I’m the wonderful transfer student*, he narrowed his eyes for a second, and directed his gaze behind him with a *In the back*.

—Ohh, feels like being a spy, Lily thought to herself in admiration.

On top of her name, she had already been announced as a fictional student of the religious school. Her ID and clothes she had already received. The room the receptionist had instructed her to was like a storage, a large amount of boxes filling it. They were only moved out to make way for the stairs, which seemed to connect underground. Following the dimly-lit path, a new scenery opened up—a western-style house, like a mansion or palace the nobles would live in.

Open-mouthed, Lily headed for the entrance. Where did they get the space for a building like this below the town? No mistaking it, even the people having lived in this town their entire life might not know of this place.

—So the others from [Tomoshihi] are waiting here, Lily swallowed her spit. This really feels like a meeting space for the elite...huh.

Just what kind of geniuses would be waiting for her. She was a bit afraid and nervous at the thought, but she would have preferred if they were skilled enough to carry her back until she developed her own skill. If not, she might find trouble with that. Holding down her beating heart, she opened the door to the building.

“Codename [Hanazono], I report of my arrival!”

Not like how a spy should be doing it, she openly announced her name.

Now, come out, you wonderful elites. With a gaze of expectation and anxiety, she directed her gaze forwards.



“Huh...?” She tilted her head, slightly confused.

Past her gaze, a bit separated from the entrance, six girls about Lily’s age had already assembled. They all carried large travel bags, directing their gazes at the sudden visitor. Apparently, they had just arrived themselves, wearing the same uniform Lily was given beforehand.

“Hey, you.”

One of them, a white-haired girl, threw her a glare. With her short cut hair, she was clad in a commanding atmosphere. Her eyes lifted up, as she gave Lily a sharp gaze, ready to stab her. With her slender body, she gave off a heavy sense of admiration.

“Tell me about your grades from the educational institution.”

“U-Um...are you all from [Tomoshihi]?”

“First, you answer my question. Don’t go giving me any stupid lies.”

—Eh, what’s this sudden interrogation? Some interview?

Lily was a bit overwhelmed with this, and stumbled to find the right words.

“T-To be completely honest, I was about to drop out—”

Before she could finish her sentence, a suspicious sound came from the entrance. The chime of a clock. The pendulum clock started shaking, the sound reverberating inside the building. Looking at the time, it is currently 6pm. The time of the meeting had just arrived.

“—Marvelous.”

All the seven girls gathered there simultaneously lifted up their heads.

Directly from the stairs, facing the entrance, a person wearing a suit appeared without anyone realizing. Because of his shoulder-long hair and white skin color, he looked like a woman for a brief second, but after gazing down his slender, yet also muscular body, it was safe to say a man was standing in front of them, but he was without a doubt a beautiful specimen. On the contrary to his beauty, his gaze was freezing cold, as he adjusted his eyes downwards to the girls. But, even more than these features, the suit, drenched with a red liquid stood out even more. It was red as blood.



"Welcome to the Kagerou Palace. I am the leader of [Tomoshibi], Ron."  
Apparently, Kagerou Palace was the name for this building. From the top of the stairs, the man continued his explanation.

"I welcome you. Together with you seven, we are [Tomoshibi]. We will be challenging the Impassable Mission."

"Eh?" Lily couldn't believe her ears.

"The mission will take place in one month. The plan was to train you all well until then, but...For today, you must be tired from the long travels, aren't you? We will start our lesson tomorrow, so deepen your bonds until then."

Ron turned on his heel, disappearing into the deeper part of the building. Lily was at a loss. What did that man just say? The members of [Tomoshibi] consisted of him, and the seven girls, her included? Only one month until the Impassable Mission?

"What's this guy planning?"

The commanding white-haired girl from before spoke up.

"Gathering us problem children here, challenging the Impassable Mission..."

At the sudden new information provided, Lily's eyes opened wide, to what the girl nodded along.

"Exactly. All seven of us here are the dropouts of our respective educational institutions."

Lily was bewildered, unable to force out a voice. Six other girls, around the same age, herself, and the mysterious man. They alone would try to challenge the impossible mission, with a mortality rate of 90%—

Since Ron just vanished without providing further explanation, the girls took it to themselves to look around the building. As visible from the outside and the entrance, the Kagerou Palace was grand and luxurious. A fiercely red carpet ran along the floor, with leather-covered sofas lined up in the lounge. The shelves in the kitchen were filled with expensive-looking, high-class tableware, and a new-type cooking stove was installed. On the way, they also found a large bath and room to play in.

Finally, they made it to the last open space, a message greeting them. On the wall, a large blackboard hung, words written on it. It seemed to have been written by a woman, as it was beautiful handwriting, something you wouldn't imagine from Ron.

'Kagerou Palace: Rules for shared-living'

"Eh, is it fine for us to live here from today on?" Lily raised voices of admiration.

So followed the other girls. Written on the blackboard in front of them were rules and other ways to peacefully spend their lives in the rooms or the residence as a whole. Lily moved through the rules, spotting no particular irregularities, except the final two, to which she tilted her head, slightly confused. On top of that. They were written in a different handwriting.

[Rule 26 - You are to work together as seven and live here]

[Rule 27 - Always be serious when going out]



Question marks appeared on the heads of the girls. The first of the two seemed rather immature, whilst the last one was more unclear than anything. All of the girls were puzzled over this, but nobody had a respective answer. However, the white-haired girl swiftly spotted an envelope on the desk next to them.

“Oh, there’s money in it. Let’s gather and open it up, okay?”

Found in the envelope were living expenses that would suffice for everyone. And, since they were all together, they decided to start preparations for the dinner. They went buying the ingredients as a group, and had everyone work on one of the parts. All the cooking utensils were high class, and not just fresh ones.

With all the girls having been raised as spies, they were relatively skilled in housework. Hence, the dinner was done in a matter of minutes. They did a toast with simple food and apple juice, exchanging idle talk, which swiftly changed. One of the girls started talking about how cruel her educational institution had been, to which another girl tapped her on the shoulder, showing sympathy. As the conversation got heated up, yet another girl mentioned it was even tougher at her own institution as she laughed, almost as if to damage herself by reminding. The talk went on and on, revealing more and more varied developments.

—Probably because everyone was basically a failure, Lily thought to herself as she listened.

There were those in the midst of them, not wanting to admit their bad grades, but they all equally went through similar hardships and trouble. Though their place of origin, their educational institution, age, everything was all over the place, they naturally got along. It was quite the eventful and dramatic first encounter, but they found each other in this luxurious western house. On top of that, their educational institutions were riddled with rules and regulations, not allowing them to enjoy a relaxing dinner like this. The food in itself was nothing special, just a randomly thrown together salad with some meat.

“I couldn’t really tell back at the institution,” Lily spoke up as she sipped on some juice. “But spies live a luxurious life like this, huh. Completely different from the image I had.”

“Right! Seems like we’ll be in heaven here.” The cheeks of the white-haired girl relaxed.

On a side note, the girl was seventeen, just like Lily. The two girls had gotten completely used to this already, doing a high-five. At the same time, another girl was calmly watching them.

“This feels kinda weird.”

The girl had brown, perm hair. Timid facial features on her, she was fifteen, still quite young. With her expression cast downwards, she had her eyebrows in a □ form, the tips of her fingers rubbed against each other as she fiddled nervously, almost like a small animal, afraid of a predator. With dampened eyes, she seemed close to breaking out in tears.

"Someone had to have been living in this house before us, I tell you."

"Hm, what about that? Not too shabby if this place got a history for itself, right?"

"And where exactly did those former residents go? Something's off with this team. All irregulars like us, and sent on an Impassable Mission? Not happenin'."

"Hmmm...? Well, I was wondering about that as well, but that guy will tell us tomorrow, right?"

The white-haired girl stuffed her cheeks with some chicken, declaring the conversation to be over. That being said, the brown-haired girl wasn't satisfied quite yet, as she cast her eyes downward again.

"It's true that it's a bit different from what I imagined." Lily tried to provide a follow-up. "But, this is also totally great in its own right."

The other girls all directed their gazes towards her. Gazing up at the chandelier hanging down from the ceiling, as she continued with a sweet tone.

"Thinking about it this way. We can live in this mansion, get three warm meals a day with just girls, practice and go onto missions, take baths, eat, play board games, go out at night to enjoy ourselves, and achieve great results as spies—Isn't that the best ever?"

"You mentioned eating four times though," the white-haired girl retorted. "The more the better."

"Well, I can't disagree with that desire of yours."

No rebelling opinion came. Maybe they all felt the same way without mentioning it.

"And there's only one way to grant ourselves this desire, isn't there." Yet another girl spoke up.

She had long, black hair, being the oldest girl in the group with her eighteen years. She had considerable proportions to gather and charm the eye of other people, with dazzlingly beautiful facial features. As if to emphasize this initiate beauty, she had an equally beautiful and kind smile.

"Succeed at the mission, with everyone here!" She said, almost sounding like the president of a committee.

At the same time, this turned into a signal to disband. Deciding on the one responsible for the cleanup with rock paper scissors, the girls headed to the rooms designated to them. Since this Kagerou Palace had more than enough rooms, they each scored a room for oneself.

Lily was satisfied at the first bonding with her new comrades, and headed to her own room. On the way there, the sight of a certain girl entered her view. It was the feeble girl, her expression still riddled in anxiety.

"...Are you still worried?" Lily called out to her out of consideration, to what the girl nodded.

"It's a bit pathetic, but...yes..." She answered in a faint voice, her facial expression stiff. "Um, Lily-san, have you ever thought of running away?"

"Running away?"

"Before we challenge the Impassable Mission, I mean."

"Hmm...I don't have any relatives or families or anything."

"Uuuu...and the school already knows that we just fake graduated...We're cornered from every direction..."

From the sounds of it, the girl didn't have any people to turn to either. With spies at the educational institutions, most of them lost their parents through accidents or other misfortune. If not for that, there would probably be way less spies.

"I think you're worrying about it too much." Lily tried to cheer up the girl, and forced up a bright smile. "Also, Ron-san wouldn't gather any worthless dropouts for nothing. If his subordinates weren't up to the task, he himself would be put in danger, don't you agree? We'll be receiving perfect classes tomorrow, in order to make us worthwhile colleagues to him."

"S-So much that we'll be able to clear the Impassable Mission...?"

"Of course! That person will give us some great classes, pulling out our secret talent, trust me."

Lily didn't say this without any fundamental basis for it. The man they met today had a different, more vast feeling of intimidating air than the other training staff. He most likely was a genius at cultivating others. On top of that, he had the confidence to gather dropouts like them, and have them challenge this mission together with him.

"...That makes sense, I guess." The expression on the brown-haired girl's face softened. "Thank you very much. I feel a bit more relaxed now. Hopefully I can sleep like this."

"No problem. We have training from tomorrow on, so let's sleep early!" Lily softly waved her hand.

Of course, she was anxious as well. The girls as they were right now had no hope of clearing this Impassable Mission. The details to the mission were still unclear, but a mortality rate of 90% was an impeccable wall for girls close to having failed the curriculum. That is why they hoped for a positive stimulation from Ron—or rather, had no other hope but that.

The second day at the Kagerou Palace arrived. As the girls all gathered in the reception hall, Ron appeared. Not in the red drenched clothes like yesterday, but with a fresh and clean pants look. Looking his good-organized, Lily and the others were entranced for a second.

"Good morning, Boss," they all gave a greeting to hide their racing hearts.

"I get the creeps being called like that," Ron furrowed his eyebrows. "Stop calling me Boss. Go with Sensei, if you have to, or Ron."

"Okay...Well, it'll be Sensei then."

"I don't mind. For now, let's start the [Tomoshibi] team meeting."

In this reception hall, sofas were lined up to form a □ sign. Sitting on these sofas, the girl's grew a bit more stiff. Ron on his part was as nonchalant as ever.

"Let me explain. [Tomoshibi] is a team founded with the sole purpose to clear the Impassable Mission. The mission consists of infiltrating a research

facility of the Galgado Empire. I will give you details at a later date, but we will have to steal a certain object from inside the facility. The reason this mission received the rank of Impassable is because of the previous failure of another spy team a month ago. Every single member has died as a result. Not one of them returned with valuable information."

Someone from the girls muttered a shocked 'Everyone died...', to what Ron nodded.

"We will depart one month from now, and enter the mission to infiltrate this research facility. We have very little time."

Hearing the contents of the mission, Lily's legs started shaking. A mission even a team of professionals cruelly failed at was now their own mission. Almost as if someone enjoyed seeing them suffer.

"Do not worry," Ron called out to them in a kind voice. "As you can see, I am the world's strongest spy. There is no better, no more skillful spy than me. If you take my classes, clearing the Impassable Mission will be mere child's play."

Apparently, he had confidence in his education. He acted almost as if he had no anxiety about this whole situation.

"I mean, there's no 'As you can see' here..." The white-haired girl retorted like Lily thought she would, showing no fear towards Ron's declaration.

Ron gazed at her for a brief moment, and gave a deep nod.

"Then you just have to take my classes, and decide for yourself."

From the wooden box stored in the reception hall, Ron took out several padlocks. Turning towards the girls, he tossed one to each.

"In the past, the Empire used these locks for their military facilities. Opening up these locks quickly and swiftly will become an essential skill during our infiltration."

Lily closely inspected the padlock she received. Rather than a normal one she was used to, it was bigger, more heavy.

"Open it. Your time limit is one minute."

A sudden trial?! Lily had no time to show any kind of reaction, just quickly taking out a lock picking tool. She knew she had to put it into the lock, but it was a specifically-made anti-lock picking padlock. She had no idea how to move the tool in order to open it up.

"This is impossible in one minute~" Lily lamented.

As she started sweating profusely, the time limit approached.

"Stop." Ron's words cut through their concentration.

As Lily looked around, only one girl had succeeded. The other six had a duplicate of a result to Lily. But, this was no surprise that they failed. At the educational institution, she had never seen such complicated padlocks.

Meanwhile, Ron collected the still closed padlocks.

"One success, huh. Don't mind it, this was all in my range of expectation."

"Ugh..." The white-haired girl's face burned red. "What about you then, can you open it?"

"Just watch me if you're doubtful."



A moment later, Ron flinged the other six locks into the air.

"These locks—open in a good manner like this."

Lily couldn't believe her eyes as she observed the obstacle in front of her.

Ron swung his arm two, three times. But, she couldn't see any more of that.

All that opened up in front of her was the eventual final result. All six opened padlocks fell onto the carpet. It didn't take one minute for one lock...rather, one second for all six.

"Woah..." One of the girls muttered in admiration.

Lily's reaction wasn't any different. His level was greatly surpassing even the best instructor of the educational institution. If one had such skill at their disposal, infiltrating any facility would be a piece of cake. That was just how much of a superhuman feat they just witnessed. This was the skill of a first-class spy. Or did he even still qualify as a human?

"I told you, didn't I. That there is no spy more proficient than me."

He undermined his confidence in his skill with a show as such. This alone had Lily stop shaking in her boots.

—I might be able to trust him.

"Is there still someone worried after watching this?"

All of the girls shook their heads sideways. Nobody dared to oppose him.

Instead, they all stared at Ron, their gazes filled with hope and expectation.

Their expressions, hungry for the next lesson. Lily herself truly felt that Ron could be the one to finally invoke some change in her. Accepting these gazes from his newfound students, Ron calmly opened his mouth.

"Now then, for the next lecture—"

"Eh?"

"Hm?"

An awkward silence filled the room for a brief moment. Ron tilted his head in slight confusion, and even Lily couldn't hold back a flustered *Huh?* but it must have been her imagination. For a second, she felt like her Sensei had said something rather odd. But, she judged that to be her misunderstanding, and lowered her head.

"Ah, I'm sorry, Sensei, for interrupting."

"Speak up if you have any doubts left."

"No, it's all good! Please continue with your explanation! I want to hear that as quickly as po—"

"That was the end of it."

"Eh...?"

"If you use the lock-picking tools in a good manner, the lock will open. You use them in a bad manner, so the locks won't open. That is the end of the explanation."

"....."

A heavy silence came from the girls, in complete unison. They gazed at each other, confirming they had the same thoughts—This man possibly is—  
At the same time, Ron also became aware that something was off, as he looked at the girl's faces with suspicion.

“...Don’t tell me, you haven’t grasped it yet?”

—Why are you looking so shocked about it? Lily threw Ron a gaze with these feelings.

Apparently having grasped this, Ron crossed his arms, only speaking up after a short silence.

“...As a special service, I will teach you the future course of my classes.

First, we have [Tell beautifully] for negotiations, then [Just strike them down] for battle, and [It'll all work out] for disguises. Will you be able to follow that?"

“Not happening.”

“Really?”

"Seriously."

"Even if I change the [Tell beautifully] to [Tell like a butterfly]?"

"That made it even more confusing."

"I see...Marvelous." Ron showed a deep nod, and let out a faint sigh. "It seems that—I am bad at teaching."

Leaving only these absurd words behind, Ron walked through the reception hall. Arriving at the exit door after passing by the girls, he turned around one last time.

“The rest is self-study.”

Thus, he stepped out of the room. Following that, absolute silence. The girls couldn't even come up with any words for this absurd situation. Taking in Ron' words, pondering about them, they eventually gazed at each other, nodded, and jolted up.

""""""""Hold on a damn second!!!""""""""

They screamed, once again in unison.

The reception hall had perfectly turned into pandemonium.

"What was I even shown just now?!"

"I can't even laugh about this!"

"I was wondering this entire time, but what is this 'Marvelous' thing even about!"

“That was pretty horrible alright...”

Who could blame the girls for these complaints. Their hope had vanished completely. Their one and only chance to clear the Impassable Mission even as the dropouts they were, gone.

“How are we supposed to take on that mission!” The brown-haired girl had a more stern expression than usual.

Lily's lips were shaking as well. Finally, the realization of how dire their situation was set in. The boss of [Tomoshibi]—that man is incredibly unreliable, almost clumsy.

"I-In the worst case, we have to practice ourselves, and get at least some proper skill..."

"But, the problem isn't just the lessons and practice", the black-haired girl put one finger on her face, quite the grown-up gesture. "He is our

instructor, as well as our Boss. Basically, he will take the guidance during the operation upon himself as well, right?”

“Eh? So basically...what?”

“Will he even be able to bring out proper orders? He might say things such as [Intrude from the back entrance with good manners] or [Dig yourselves in like a mole], you know?”

That sounded awfully possible. Rather, he would surely be doing that. To that, Lily could feel all the blood drain from her face.

“As if I’d just give up like this!” The white-haired girl screamed in the face of this unprecedented danger.

The dam for the other girls broke as well, as they let out all their frustration. It was a perfect 180 turn from heaven to hell. And thus, the newly-formed spy team [Tomoshibi] collapsed after a mere hour of activity. Lily carried the ingredients as she walked through the crowd. Thankfully, she could catch some fresh air after that incident, but she couldn’t find any strength to walk from her legs, just managing to make her way back to the Kagerou Palace on heavy feet. On the way there, she almost lost the potatoes she was carrying several times, sighing deeply.

*Why did this happen...?*

As a final result, Ron locked himself up in his room, not coming out. Hence, the girls had no other choice but to practice the lock-picking themselves. That being said, they did the exact same thing at the educational institution as well, so naturally they wouldn’t find any rapid progress. If they managed to do so at the institution, they wouldn’t be dropouts after all. No way they would be skilled enough to make it out alive through the Impassable Mission.

*Really, who was it?! Saying that Sensei would be giving us perfect classes! What a fool! Rather than having my talent bloom, there will be flowers blooming on my grave!*

Lily cursed to herself, as she shivered in the face of this despair. Thinking back to it, the chief director of her educational institution maybe wanted to warn her about this.

—Will you run away?

The words of a comrade played back inside her head.

*But, even if we run away, what awaits us will just be...and also—*

What will happen if she runs away, leaving back the others?

‘Well, I can’t disagree with that desire of yours,’ the white-haired girl had nodded along.

‘Succeed at the mission, with everyone here!’ the black-haired girl had said with a smile.

‘I feel a bit more relaxed now. Hopefully I can sleep like this,’ were the words of the brown-haired girl with a feeble smile.

They had spent a mere evening together with each other. But, they were all around the same age as Lily, having gone through similar circumstances before. Could she just leave them to their own demise, as she runs away...?

*...But, all I can do is...*

A single idea popped up inside her head.

—Her one and only possible breakthrough.

However, she immediately told herself off, saying it's impossible. Still, the plan in her head didn't disappear as quickly. The more time passed, the more she realized there were no other options. And then, it happened. Lily heard the voice of an elderly woman coming from inside a mass of people.

"A purse snatcher!"

Reflexively, Lily turned towards the voice. A large man was carrying the bag, rushing through the crowd. Pushing away countless people on his way, he kept running—in the direction of Lily.

"Outta my way, brat!" he reached out towards her.

Thick, log-like arms pushed her away, as she fell down on the roadside with a shriek. During that time, the man ran away.

"Ouch..." Lily rubbed the dust off her butt, gathering up the potatoes that fell on the ground.

After counting that she didn't lose any in the process, she got up from the ground, as the elderly woman approached her. She seemed to have been the victim of the purse snatching.

"Are you okay, little lady?"

"Hm? Ah, yes, I'm okay."

The old woman lowered her eyebrows as she sighed.

"Seems like we were both unlucky. Well, we still have our lives to work with."

"Yes...you're right." Lily returned a smile. "As long as we're alive."

"Right right."

"As long as we're alive, we can eat some delicious dinner!"

"You're cutely positive, little lady."

"Of course! I was worrying like crazy, and now I had to be bothered by this? They better be careful—that they're still alive."

The old woman's face stiffened up a bit.

"Hm? Who might you be talking about?"

"Eh, isn't that obvious?" Lily snickered, and pointed a bit ahead. "The purse snatcher."

Past where she pointed, the large man was—collapsed on the ground.

Seeing this, the old woman had an expression as if she couldn't comprehend what just happened. The man who just stole her purse had his mouth foaming, as he laid there, unconscious. Just in that one moment.

"It must have been a chronic disease."

Lily walked next to the man, pulling out the **needle**. Taking back the stolen purse, she restrained him with her ribbon. The rest could surely be handled by the incoming police. Watching the man lay down at her feet, Lily gave a faint nod.

*Yes...We are spies after all.*



She proceeded to hand the flustered old woman the bag, and asked with a grin.

“Hey, old lady, where are some famous sightseeing spots in this town?”

No other choice but to do it. No matter how strong the enemy, she had but one play at her disposal. Hesitating needlessly would only lessen the time she had. Unseen by anyone, the girl showed a calm smile.

*If I don't have any other methods—then I can only bring down the target.*

*Lily muttered inside her chest.*

Thus, she started acting.

*Codename [Hanazono]—It is time to bloom and go wild.*

Ron's room was located in a corner of the Kagerou Palace's second floor.

There existed several conspicuous and luxurious rooms in said Kagerou Palace, but Ron didn't inhabit any of those. From the configuration of the rooms, his own should not be too wide.

Fantasizing about the idea of Ron having used some sort of special trap or device, Lily knocked on the door. As she anticipated, no response came.

Knocking again and again, eventually hammering on the door out of frustration, Lily opened the door, and found Ron. Maybe he had the rule to ignore knocks himself for some absurd reason.

The room looked like a crime scene. A red liquid, splashed against every possible object in the room, leading to Lily letting out a shriek. However, she the scent of oil entered her nose, and after realizing it was just paint, she was relieved. Meanwhile, Ron sat down on the chair in front of the canvas, crossing his arms.

“What brings you here?” He raised his head. “I am busy, as you can see.”

“With what?”

“Searching for new methods to teach you.”

It only looked like he was drawing something. However, a great amount of books were at his feet, with each title containing ‘Education’. He apparently was doing proper research, quite diligently even. However, that in itself made Lily wonder why he needed to draw an oil painting on the canvas, so she took a closer look at the drawing.

As she did, she saw that almost the entirety of the canvas was painted with one type of red, like an abstract painting. In the lower right, it said [Family]. Was that supposed to be the title? This painting, with its only future ending up in the trash bin, was supposed to represent [Family]? As always, Lily had no hopes of understanding the man's thought process.

“Sensei, do you feel like you'll come up with something?”

“Not at all.” He gave an immediate response.

Lily let her head hang, yet again realizing how helpless this man was.

“Do not worry. I will come up with a conclusion during the next week. Until then, I'd like you to indulge in self-study.”

They couldn't wait for not even a day longer. The day of the mission was but only one month away. Swallowing her spit, Lily brought forth her proposal.

“Sensei, I might have an idea.”

"What is it?"

"Would you go out with me right now?"

Ron raised one eyebrow.

"Why...?"

"For a change of pace." Lily nodded. "Just staying in narrow places like this, your thoughts and ideas will be limited as well. At times like this, let's take a walk! Not keep at it until you collapse, but freshen up a bit. It's important as well."

"I did take a walk last week."

"Ah, then it's okay...Of course not!"

"You sure have a lot of energy to spare." Ron scoffed, and shook his head left and right. "I'm happy for the consideration...but, I can't join you."

"But, staying in this room the entire day didn't help that much either, didn't it?"

"You sure know how to stab where it hurts." Ron narrowed his eyes for a second.

Lily's heartbeat accelerated for a second, thinking she had angered him, but his expression didn't change all too much. Rather, it looked like he was laughing.

"Let's go, Sensei! I asked around town for some interesting places!"

"I see. And, anything interesting?"

"Hehe! A lot actually. For example, the Kotoko Museum, a 2000 year old historic ruin exhibit, or a travelling amusement park!"

"Not my thing. What else?"

"Else...? Um...I heard of 'Kaede Alley', gathering various exotic foods, a beach with a rumoured ghost, or a church with beautiful stained glass."

Since Ron didn't seem completely disinterested, Lily just blurted out all the different things she had heard about.

"....." Ron accepted these with a short silence. "—Marvelous." He crossed his arms in a satisfied manner. "Alright. But, it's already evening today. Let us head out tomorrow."

Looking outside the nearby window, the sky had already been colored in a strong orange. Lily would have been fine going out right now, but she didn't want to force Ron more than necessary, else she could risk spoiling his mood.

"Yes! Then, let us meet tomorrow!" Lily showed a bright smile.

The first stage was cleared.

The exact opposite of what the name 'Kaede Alley' suggested, it wasn't deep in the mountains where maple trees<sup>4</sup> would grow, but rather in the midst of the city. It offered imported luxury items from overseas. The scale was even greater in the entire Republic of Deen, with many stores and stalls lined up, especially during holidays. To that, a fragrant smell ran through the street, originating from food stalls like grilled shrimps or potatoes, bacon and mushroom sauté, walnut cakes, and many more delicious foods just kept entering your field of view.

During her third noon of her stay at the Kagerou Palace, Lily could only gaze at this sight in astonishment. Everywhere she looked, people were laughing. Kids were licking on lollipops as they walked with their parents hand in hand, couples were window shopping, enjoying their dates. An old person was standing in front of a clockwork store, astonished by the detailed art on one of the clocks. In the midst of this vivid city vibe, Lily raised her voice.

"Woaaaaah, I've never seen so many people! So bothersome!"

"....."

"I'm sorry, the latter part was my true feelings..."

"That error was quite detrimental," Ron pointed out, right next to Lily.

"That reminds me, what about the other members? I thought at least a few of them would join us."

"I did invite them, but they all said they wanted to do some self-training."

That was a lie. She just slipped past them.

The two of them started walking through the street. As for their plan, they would first window-shop at the stalls, then eat seafood at a nearby, highly-evaluated restaurant. On the way there were some stalls with delicious canned food, so they'd do a quick stop there. Additionally, another store with seafood such as shrimps or crabs lay on their way, but since they didn't have any plans of returning to the Kagerou Palace any time soon, Lily had to give up on that, keeping it on her memo for now.

As they walked past the countless stalls, Ron called out to Lily.

"That reminds me, you came from a remote place, haven't you. Do you not come to the bigger cities that often?"

"Yes, it was always a lot of trouble for practical exercises and so on. It was hard to walk, and I always lost my footing, ending up lost. Right now I'm perfectly used to it though."

"Are you now? Certainly doesn't look that way to me."

"I'm used to being lost."

"Explains a lot." Ron nodded, changing the direction his body faced. "The restaurant you're looking for is over here."

Apparently, Lily had already wandered down the wrong way. Feeling her face growing hot, she swiftly lined up next to Ron again.

"Sensei, a question." Lily put up one finger. "Please tell me the route from the train station until here."

"...Hm? You head southwest from the train station, take a left at the post office, take a right at the undertaker, and after walking for a while, it's right at the radio store."

"So you can properly teach other people!"

"Of course? We had to take a detour because of emergency construction work, but it would be normal to know the way, right?"

"Eh, was there ever a sign of construction work? How did you know?"

"Was just a feeling."

"....."

—Why can't you tell us the crucial parts of what you're saying!  
But, blurting it out to blame him wouldn't do any good, so Lily swallowed her words.

"Maybe because of the number of pedestrians around us? Or how the amount of people passing us was different from usual?"

"Ahh, now that you say it, that might have been it." Ron admitted.  
From the looks of it, he didn't hide it on purpose, he just wasn't aware of it.  
Lily groaned.

—I wonder why? What reason is there for a difference in things he can, and cannot tell us properly?

But, at that time.

"Kya—" Lily stumbled over her legs. "I'm falling!" She ironically screamed in the middle of that.

She hadn't paid enough attention to the cavity of the stone paving. At the same time as she felt her own body fall, she let go of the four cans of canned food she was holding. Before her chin hit the hard pavement however, her body calmly came to a halt.

"—You okay?"

Directing her face over to the source of the voice, Ron was embracing her body to support it. His handsome face was right in front of her, and after realizing that, she felt her own well-endowed chest hitting the man's arm.

"Hahyaa!" Lily jumped up.

Scorching heat filled her body in but one second. At the same time, Ron's expression was as indifferent as ever, showing no signs of breaking. Taking a closer look, he held all the cans that were flinged into the air with his other hand. He hadn't just caught Lily, but also saved the good amount of money they used.

"E-Even if you don't have any teaching skill, you're plenty skilled in other regards..."

A pathetic way to hide her embarrassment.

"What should I do with praise about something of this level?" Ron shook his head left and right.

Almost as if Lily said something vexing.

"Let me tell you, I finally understood the reason why I cannot give any good guidance."

"Is that so?"

But, not answering Lily's surprise, Ron just threw the cans high up into the air. They rotated several times, and flew down towards Lily. Lily then opened both her arms, catching all of them.

"What was that about, all of a sudden...?"

"How did you catch these cans?"

"Eh, well, I used my hands as a bowl, and—"

"What about the movement of your feet?"

"....."

Lily didn't know how to respond to that.

—Feet? Did I even move them just now? Did I adjust them to the trajectory of the falling cans? Did I bend forward a bit as I caught them? I feel like I focussed the center of my weight on my left leg, but I can't say for sure... How should I answer this...?

"...I just.....moved them."

"That is what I'm feeling." Ron boldly declared. "You can easily say 'I caught the cans', but you should not be able to reiterate every single action you've taken."

"You're joking right..." Lily muttered.

In contrast to what his words sounded like, his gaze was serious. Basically, he was saying their sensation, their intuition was just vastly different—between Ron and the girls. Just as humans can't properly explain how to actually grab an object. How they can't properly explain the way they get up in the morning. How they take off their shirt. This was comparable to Ron during negotiations, whilst wearing a disguise, or even during battle.

—But then, how much would he have to go through to—Lily stopped herself.

"But, doesn't that mean you will never be able to properly teach us..."

"I'm working it out in my head right now."

Though his response sounded indifferent, detached almost, there was a color of fatigue burning in his eyes. Lily remembered the mountain of stacked books in his room. He was certainly not neglecting any work that would make him improve. He was earnestly, honestly, thoroughly working through his worries, and yet still couldn't find any measures to improve.

"....." Lily closed her eyes for a second.

Then, she opened her eyes wide, giving a triumphant pose.

"No! We cannot forget the original reason we have come here!"

"What's wrong?"

"Refreshing time! We have to ignore the small stuff, and get a free head"

"Quite the moody person, aren't you."

"Yes, I was called the 'Neither be my enemy nor my ally, please' girl, you know!"

"Treated like a weird person, how pitiful."

"I don't want to hear that from Sensei of all people!"

With idle talk, they started walking through the street again, stalls to their left and right. There, at a storefront, a single touristic picture stood out.

"Sensei! Look at this" Lily pulled forcefully on Ron's sleeve.

What Lily spotted was a picture hung up on a juice stall. It was showing a lake, surrounded by nature. Though it was in monochrome, you could clearly see the soothing scene happening.

"What a beautiful place..."

"Oh, the picture of Lake Emai, huh." The store owner gave a swift explanation. "If you take the governmental bus from the train station, it takes you two hours tops to get there. Well, today's a holiday, so probably a bit longer."

"Ohh, so it's a popular spot!"



“Not just popular, it’s the most famous sightseeing spot in the entire town. With the nouveau riche of the capital, it’s quite the senatorium to visit. You can even borrow a boat to get a closer look at the center.”

As thanks for the information, Lily bought a can of juice, and flashed a smile over towards Ron.

“Hehe, seems like we found another influential piece of information. Let’s check it out later.”

“...Sure, why not.” Ron agreed.

It certainly didn’t look like a reluctant reaction. He might have even been enjoying himself.

Thus, the second stage was cleared as well.

After finishing the menu at the restaurant, the two of them finally made it to the location of Lake Emai. Just as the store owner predicted, it took them around two hours, but instead of the bus, Ron was the one driving, so it went by pretty calmly. Contrary to Lily’s expectations towards Ron’s private vehicle, it was nothing flashy, just a black four-seater you could find everywhere.

After she pointed that out in a jesting manner, Ron just retorted an indifferent *Spies aren’t supposed to stand out*, which didn’t give her any chance of rebuttal. That being said, it felt rather insulting to get someone of odd caliber like Ron to tell her about logic.

Nevermind that for now however, just as the store owner had advertised with, Lake Emai was immensely popular, with parasols lining up close to it, people gulping down cocktails as they enjoyed their holiday. At the lake shore, they were greeted with a billboard, explaining a bit about the lake. It was an isolated lake, surrounded by mountains, around one kilometer in each cardinal direction. If one rented a boat, and made their way to the middle of the lake, you could admire the true tranquility.

Because there was barely any breeze going on, the water surface looked just like a mirror, reflecting the sunlight. Being able to experience this in the middle of the lake with the use of a boat would surely be a once in a lifetime experience.

“With this amount of people, I doubt there’s a boat we can borrow,” Ron commented.

“If so, then we just have to wait for our turn,” answered Lily, prepared to take the time to wait.

Luckily however, once they actually arrived at the location, there was one rowing boat left, perfectly made for the two of them.

“Oh, lucky lucky~”

“By the way...in this case, I’ll be the one rowing?”

“Well, it’s the job of the man I assume.”

Ron set foot into the boat with *Yeah, figures*, reaching out towards Lily with his hand. After a brief moment of hesitation, Lily took his hand, following him. Unexpectedly, his hand had been softer than anticipated.

Shortly after their departure, they swiftly made it to the center of the lake, thanks to Ron's skilled rowing. When Lily felt the need to praise him through *You sure are fast*, Ron returned a rather mysterious response, arguing that *I was just rowing like a cloud*.

The sun started to set, and with the sky turning red, the trees of the mountains, as well as the water surface equally changed color. At this distance away from the lake shore, the people looked like nothing but bitter oranges. They couldn't even hear any sounds anymore, no other boats in their close vicinity. Only Lily and Ron were in this world, looking as if it was burning.

"It's way prettier than in the picture."

"Yeah."

This once, he didn't say his usual 'Marvelous' again. He must have some principle to it.

"Lily."

"Eh, yes! T-This is the first time you've called me by my name."

"What you have seen today, and what you are seeing right now, do not ever forget it." He directed his gaze over at the people on the shore. "Do not forget the smiles of the children, playing in the alley. Do not forget this nature's beauty, making you want to stare at it forever. Do not forget the dear people on the shore, colored by the setting sun."

"People..."

"Twelve years ago, this country was invaded by the Empire. Even after announcing its neutrality. Suffering from the one-sided invasion, the inhabitants were slaughtered. Ten years after the war, the Empire is once again invading this country through the [War waged in Shadows]."

"Eh, really?"

"That alley we've visited today might have looked peaceful on the outside, but once, a destructive blast occurred, caused by a spy of the Empire. Their goal was to assassinate an influential person of the Department of State.

The one who caught wind of that was a spy excelling at gathering information. Not the police, a soldier, or a bureaucrat." Ron announced.

"The world is filled with pain and suffering. The only ones able to avert this ridiculousness...are us spies."

In order to make sure, Ron finished his words with a final *Do not forget*. Satisfied after that, he gazed at the setting sun once again.

"....."

She was hit with passionate emotions, but Lily's heart instead cooled down. Even though they were watching the exact same scenery, the feelings of the two were vastly different. He must have no idea about Lily having listened to these words with such indifference.

"...But, once you die, everything is lost." Lily opened her mouth. "The country being important, clearing the mission, all that being a wonderful thing, I understand. Right before I would have lost my life in the war, I was saved by a spy. That is why I want to work hard being a spy. Because I

respect them. However, exactly for that reason, I cannot just bet my life that easily.”

In the midst of her explanation, she was unable to look Ron in the eyes.

“That is why I have the willpower to eventually bloom and take pride in myself.”

“.....”

“Maybe because I am a failure. Forced to go through a harsh time at the educational institution, looked down upon. Even if I become a spy with good luck, and die a pointless death, what exactly was my life even for then...?”

—Though I’m sure you wouldn’t understand these chilled feelings inside of me. Because you and I are too different...

Lily sighed, and formed a fist in front of her chest.

“Sensei...”

“What?”

“The wind has gotten a bit chilly. Can I get a bit closer to you...?”

“There’s no wind blowing though?”

“Girls get cold much easier, okay.”

Lily lifted up her waist, approaching Ron. With the center of balance changing, the boat shook ever so slightly.

“I realized, you know. The reason for gathering dropouts like us...so that you have [Sacrificial Pawns].”

There couldn’t have been any other reason, pairing up irregulars and dropouts, and a tutor who doesn’t know how to teach. Rather, she admired the thought process.

Using the girls for a suicide attack on this mission to gather any sort of information. Since they were all good-for-nothings, no value was lost even if they died. They would exchange their lives for information, enabling this first-rate spy a higher chance at success.

Lily put her hand on Ron’ lap. Bringing her face closer, they were looking each other in the eye.

“Through the entire day, I realized. You aren’t made out to be an instructor. All we can do is die. I don’t want that. I will definitely make it through this, with a smile. I will have someone help me in letting my talents bloom. No matter the method, I will not hesitate, so I cannot die just yet.”

“Lily...?”

“I’m sorry, Sensei. I am as serious as can be.”

Lily gazed deep into Ron’ pupils.

“Codename [Hanazono]—It is time to bloom and go wild.”

It happened right after. From Lily’s cleavage—Poison gas was releasing.



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Twelve years ago—During the time of the Galgado Empire's invasion, a weapon greatly defying any human values, was used. Possessing insane lethality, it didn't leave behind traces like a bomb would, just staying behind until the wind blew it away—Poison gas.

For an actual test run, the administration of the Galgado Empire picked an unlucky small village in the Republic of Deen. In the blink of an eye, the plentiful and harmless village turned into a depiction of hell, hundreds of villagers losing their lives without even knowing how—or why even.

And then, a soldier hurried to the scene, after receiving information from a spy, making discovery. A girl, left behind as she was on death's doorstep, carrying a certain idiosyncrasy.

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Even Ron shouldn't have been able to counter the sudden gush of poison gas. He might have been able to sense it, but that wouldn't give him much opportunity to escape. The two of them were separated by a mere centimetre, and Lily was holding down his legs. With this, the poison gas should directly enter his body through mouth and nose. Ron looked rarely flustered, sending Lily flying. But, it was already too late, the poison had already started working.

"Paralysis...Impossible...poison..." Ron deduced, having problems forcing out his voice.

He gazed down at the quivering fingertips of his, panicky closing off his mouth with his hand. Unable to even keep a seated posture, Ron's body had started to collapse.

"Impossible...Using poison in gas form is suicide..."

"This poison won't work against me."

"...What do you mean?"

"It's my idiosyncrasy." Lily laughed as if it didn't even matter.

In the midst of this poisonous cloud, enough to render a fully-grown man like Ron helpless, she looked entirely out of place with her nonchalant attitude.

"And? Even Sensei won't be able to work against the effects of this poison, right?"

At this point in time, the gas must have already floated up into the sky, slowly dispersing. However, this amount had been enough to show effect on Ron.

As he was laying sideways on the boat, his body was shivering ever so slightly. To that, Lily showed an overwhelming laugh.

"Ahaha! That was easier than expected, deceiving a first-class spy."

Ron was shaking, a pale expression on his face. Thanks to the poison, he seemed unable to even move a muscle. In order to create a situation such as this, Lily had to take several steps of preparation. Inviting him out for a 'Change of pace', taking the natural flow, they would come up to the boat rental. Barely using the word 'Lake', she succeeded in deceiving him. No



matter how much of a world-class spy he was, even he would not be able to muster a counterattack.

"Hehe, now, time for some threatening, Sensei<sup>5</sup>~"

"Don't...joke with me..." Ron glared at her. "What...is your intent with this...?"

"I want you to promise me something."

"If you're fine with a fake one, I can give you some?"

"Please don't give me that nonsense. I have confidence in my own poison, you know?" Lily spoke up with a sweet voice, taking out another weapon from her pocket.

A needle, dripping with a violet liquid.

"My special sure-fire poison—Even a grown man like you will lose consciousness if you're stabbed by this needle."

"Wha..."

"If you show resistant behaviour, I will give you a shot of this needle's efficiency."

I will have you fulfill the promise, is what Lily was trying to get at, as she pushed the needle close to Ron's eyes. It was the same poison that had the purse snatcher collapse in a matter of seconds. Even though he had this grave danger right in front of him, Ron didn't move. Rather, he couldn't move. Seeing this, Lily smiled yet again.

"I have two demands. The disbandment of [Tomoshibi], as well as the safety of the current members."

"....."

"We don't want to die—Not because of an instructor, unable to teach us."

If it was him, he should have enough money and connections to use for their sake. Besides depending on this, Lily, as well as the others, had no hopes of making it out alive. Hearing this, Ron put pressure into his gaze.

"Stop with the jokes...if you get any closer, I will fight back."

"No need to lie. This poison will leave you like this for a while. And also, you don't have any weapons on you right now, am I wrong?"

"Why do you...?"

"Because I checked. Back when I fell over, and you caught me."

A worthless threat wouldn't work. Hence, preparations were necessary.

Ron's eyes opened wide.

"So you tripping back at the valley was pure acting."

"Y-Yes, o-of course, it was all according to my plan...?"

It was pure coincidence. She had planned to take a different approach to conduct a body check.

"A-Anyway, Sensei<sup>6</sup>, you will listen to my demands."

Lily pushed out her chest in a confident manner, approaching Ron even further with the needle. With the polished talent she had been given from a young age, she brought down a first-rate spy. This would be the end.

"...You sure talk a lot."

From the looks of it, the target gave up on resisting.

"The paralytic poison filled my body in a matter of seconds. All I can move is the tip of my tongue, and my toes. Swimming now would prove impossible. Even if I screamed for help, we're in the dead center of the lake. Right in front of me is an apprentice spy, and I can't expect to find any weapons randomly hidden on this boat we borrowed. This truly is—"

"Checkout, yes."

"You mean checkmate."

She messed up the deciding phrase, but luckily, Ron didn't pick on her too much.

"However, there's one thing I don't understand," he spoke up.

"...Hm? What is it, this late in the game?"

"It's been a mystery for me this entire time."

"And, what is?"

"Lily—" Ron turned a confused doubt at her. "How long do I have to play along in this situation?"

Together with these words, two irregularities suddenly appeared.

"Eh?"

At Lily's right foot, shackles. Next, the bottom of the boat was slowly filling with water. Lily didn't even register what had happened, as she tried to grasp the situation. She realized. Ron had been stretching out his left leg. Using very slim movement, he activated some sort of device.

"W-What is this?"

"Specialized shackles. Additionally, I pulled out the cork of the boat."

"Cork...?"

"In eight minutes, this boat will sink. So will you, as the chains pull you down with it."

Lily finally realized. The shackles around her foot were connected to the boat with chains. Because she had been sitting the entire time, she hadn't realized. Quickly, she took out a lock-picking tool from her uniform, frantically putting it into the keyhole, sadly to no avail. She couldn't even make out how the lock was made up. Hence, she gave up on freeing herself, and focussed on the chains instead. To her misfortune, the thick metallic chains wouldn't move no matter what she did.

"You can't take them off." Ron spoke up. "The key is nowhere on this boat, and with your current skill, you won't be able to open the shackles. Meaning, whatever you may try, you will sink down to the bottom of this lake."

"No way..."

"Unless I open the lock for you."

"...!"

"Give me the antidote. That is my condition."

—So that's what you were aiming for, Lily bit her lip.

But, she still hadn't lost completely.

"B-But, that doesn't matter! If you don't want to get stabbed with this poisonous needle, then—"

"Go right ahead then."

"Eh..."

"If you stab me, then I will lose consciousness, right? Who will open the lock for you in that instance?"

"Ugh..."

This time, Lily was backed into a corner. No cards in her hand to fight back. Rather, she is the one with the bigger problem now. The water wouldn't stop flooding the boat, and would eventually sink underwater. She couldn't accept this—Just a few seconds ago, she was standing on top of all of this.

"How...?"

"Hm?"

Lily howled like a sulking child.

"I didn't tell anybody that I fiddled with the boat! When did you even have time to doctor with the boat yourself?! This is just crazy!"

"Yesterday evening. It was obvious that you were fiddling around here at the lake."

"That quickly...?"

"This Lake Emai is a rather popular sightseeing spot. That being the case, when we were talking about the places you heard of, you didn't even bring up this lake. Why would you not bring up such a promising location towards the person you're trying to convince? That caught my attention."

Thus, Lily understood her fatal mistake. She had been too careless. For this operation, she decided on this lake as her crucial point of attack. In order to not raise any possible suspicion in Ron, she tried not mentioning the lake at all, making this flow events as natural as possible. But, that was a fatal mistake. And of course it was. This man as a spy. Him not knowing all the sightseeing spots would be fatal. As a consequence, not bringing up the lake made it even more suspicious.

"On top of that, a lot of visitors would always rest along the shore, so the only way to set up a trap would be for you to use a boat like this."

"But, there was no guarantee that we would be using this boat! We just happened to use this—"

"Yeah, by pure coincidence, this one boat was left. You should have considered this to be suspicious already. With this beautiful scenery happening in the middle of the lake, and all these visitors sitting at the shore, why was this one boat left?"

"Eh..."

"Look closer at your feet—From my seat as the rower."

Wondering what he was on about, Lily took a closer look, only to swallow her breath. It was right below the seat she was sitting on, the entire time. A warning was written on the boat with paint, saying [In Repair]. Lily had to question her own perception for not having realized this the entire time.

"Quit the immature trick," Ron commented with a parched voice. "You can only see this warning if you act as the rower. From your point of view, it's in your blind spot. But, that was enough for nobody to use this boat."

Borrowing boats like this is fairly popular, you know. And still, this one boat was left on the shore."

In the event that a boy and girl would be using this boat, the man would obviously take the role of the rower, looking into the direction they were going, with the woman across from him. Hence, the only chance for Lily to spot this warning would have been when she stepped onto the boat, but Ron stole her attention as he took her by the hand. This resulted in her completely unaware of the trap.

"This concludes the explanation. Lily—You aren't even a proper enemy." Being shown their overwhelming difference in skill and talent, Lily could only bite her lip in silence.

"S-So my plan was plain obvious from the start..."

She couldn't accept such a fatal failure. At the same time, Ron let out a sigh.

"On top of that, I was already prepared to be attacked yesterday when you entered my room."

"Eh, why is that...?"

—That was way too soon!

Lily's eyes opened wide, waiting for Ron's explanation.

"—Just a feeling."

"I was an idiot for getting my hopes up, even just for a second!"

"Enough of that. Hurry up, and give me the antidote. The boat is slowly starting to sink."

With a disappointed *I really don't want to, but...*, Lily put one hand in her pocket. She realized that something was off right away.

"Huh...?"

"What's wrong?"

"The antidote...is missing..."

"Stop." Ron sighed yet again. "We don't have the time for such jokes. You're just embarrassing yourself."

"No, you're wrong...It really isn't there..."

"Again, I won't be deceived by lies such as—"

"I forgot it in my room....."

".....Huh?" Ron's eyes flashed wide open.

His reaction greatly exceeded the one he showed back when Lily dispersed the poison in the air.

"...The poison user forgot the antidote?"

"I was so nervous, okay...I-I'm not good with seductive measures...!"

"Seductive measures? When did you use them?"

"L-Leaving that aside...U-Ummm...Ehehe, S-Sensei, can you open the lock without the antidote?"

"Impossible. My fingertips are shaking." Ron stretched out his hand to show Lily. "I probably won't even be able to swim at this rate."

"Ahaha, figures~"

"....."

“.....”

Still paralyzed by the poison, Ron stayed silent. So did Lily, her foot still clad in the shackles. As the two of them looked at each other, an ominous watery *Plopp* sound rang out. It was the starting signal that the boat started to sink.

“...Lily, this is an order.”

“...Yes.”

“Row like your life depended on it.” Ron narrowed his eyes. “Well—your life actually depends on it.” He quickly corrected himself.

Lily heard this, and grabbed the oars.

“Nooooooooooooo! I don’t wanna dieeeeeeeeeee!”

With this scream, she started rowing with all her might. Ron on the other hand, equally being in grave danger, was as relaxed as can be.

“Don’t worry. I said we had eight minutes left before, but that was a lie.”

“Reallyyyyy?”

“We have nine minutes and five seconds.”

“That doesn’t help too much!”

“Lily, row like a clou—”

“At least help me out a bit!!!”

Lily had forgotten that she was one responsible for Ron’ sealed movement. Frustration and anger as her fuel, she rowed towards the coast with all her might.

At the same time Lily made it back to the coast, all strength left her body, and she collapsed on the boat.

“We somehow made it back alive...” Lily sighed.

Half the boat had sunken under water, leaving only a paper-thin difference towards the side not having sunken. They didn’t return back to the place they originated from, but rather arrived at a part of the shore with nobody around. Hence, they could enjoy the scenery of the radiating burning bright setting sun, the illuminated water surface, and the various birds flying towards the sun, all for themselves. Not like they had any time to really enjoy it though.

Instead, Lily was busy resting her exhausted limbs. She managed to survive for today, but what awaited her now?

“Haaa, I failed...” Lily gazed up at the evening sky. “A failure will always be a failure, huh. No hope of winning against a first-class spy.”

“Don’t be like that. Your poison wasn’t half bad.”

“You say that, but you probably got hit on purpose, right?”

“All in order to test your ability.”

The poison had worn off apparently, as Ron was back on his feet again, jesting with the passing birds, as some of them landed on his arm. Seems as if he was quite liked by animals. Though Lily really wanted him to hurry taking off her shackles, she was in no position at all to do so.

“Nothing changed, huh.”



All she could do was complain, and accept the fact that not a single problem had been taken care off.

"I'm an absolute failure, Sensei still can't teach us, the mission is still a 90% mortality rate, and the time limit is approaching more and more."

On top of that, Lily poisoned a superior. No mistaking it, a harsh punishment is waiting for her. Pain, and agony, her future was filled with.

"...I really admired them...the spies saving this country..."

After all this struggling, this was the result. She couldn't change anything, couldn't accomplish anything. Her fate must have already been decided.

Almost laughable after all the efforts she went through.

"I will make that come true."

However, Ron just announced in a calm voice.

"Eh?" Lily pushed up her body.

"Don't give up on your ideals like that. You have the qualities that it takes. The battle itself was more like playing around, but you felt the danger to your own life, and acted straight towards your own goals, I have no complaints—Marvelous."

"I-I won't accept this just because you praise me!"

Ron let the birds on his arm fly off, and walked towards Lily. Slightly kicking the shackles with his shoe tip, under whatever logic it might have worked, the lock opened without any resistance.

"Lily, become the leader of [Tomoshihi]."

"Eh?"

"I will stay the boss of [Tomoshihi], but someone who acts as the center of my subordinates is essential. I do not know what you are aiming at with your 'Bloom and take pride in yourself', but how about clearing the Impassable Mission as the leader of [Tomoshihi]?"

Lily had no idea what he was talking about, just panicking on the spot. Out of the blue, after her resistance against her own boss, she was suddenly offered the role as the leader of the specialized spy team to clear the Impassable Mission. It was like a divine revelation. In midst pitch-black darkness, a new light appeared. Met with contempt as a failure at her respective educational institution, she escaped from that very school in order to change herself—And now a new way in life appeared.

"I-If you're really okay with me...then I'd be pretty happy..."

"Then, you are the leader. Let's both work hard to clear the Impassable Mission."

"O-Oh, leader...that sounds kinda nice..." Lily repeated the title she was granted, spellbound.

She thought like he heard Ron mutter *What an easy fellow* under his breath, but her head was somewhere else already.

"B-But, how? In the end, you still can't teach us—"

"Thanks to you, that problem has been taken care off."

"Taken care off?" Lily tilted her head in confusion, to what Ron nodded.

"Yes, I came up with the perfect teaching method."

—Just when...?

It would take the following day until Lily found out.

The fourth day at the Kagerou Palace.

The members of [Tomoshibi] had gathered in the reception hall. Thinking they'll probably be forced through another ridiculous lesson like before, they all had gloomy expressions. But, deep inside them, they couldn't throw away that last glimmer of hope. That the first lesson was just a misunderstanding, and that this time it would start for good.

As everyone was seated on the sofas, Ron came in, standing in front of them. He crossed his arms, closed his eyes, and kept quiet. Ten seconds passed like this. Right as the girls wondered what that weirdo was up to now, Ron finally opened his mouth.

"Now, it's just as you can see."

"What is?" The white-haired girl asked in a commanding tone.

"An apology."

"I ain't seeing anything."

Thus, the girls gave up on a sudden change in that man. But, Ron didn't realize, or just didn't pay any attention to them, and just started explaining.

"Let me confess. To be completely honest, it's my first time being the boss of a spy team, as well as an instructor."

"....."

"Unexpected, right?"

If they retorted now, it would be their own loss, so the girl's just ignored him.

"Apparently, since I am inexperienced, I forced you through a rough time. I'm sorry about that. From now on, I want to reveal as much information as I can and am allowed to. If you have any questions, feel free."

"Then, I have two." The white-haired girl raised her hand.

She really was a tough fellow, even glaring at Ron.

"Who exactly are you?"

"I can't say that."

"What was the reason we were chosen for this mission?"

"I can't say that either."

"Eat shit and die."

"The information spies can reveal is very limited. I would love to tell you all, but I'm not allowed to. That being said, we have to establish a relationship built upon trust. That is what it means to be a spy team. That is all I can do, so please accept that," Ron took a soft breath. "You are not just sacrificial pawns. I will not let you die."

His expression turned as serious as never before.

"I promise. If even one of you were to lose her life, I will follow you, and kill myself."

The girls' eyes went round. In Ron' words, there was no acting, but just strong conviction. He was not lying. He was not deceiving them. He was

dead-set on clearing the Impassable Mission, just with the girls in front of him.

“B-But?” The brown-haired girl let out a feeble voice, with her eyebrows in a □ shape as always. “As of right now, we are all dropouts, so clearing that mission is just—”

Ron shook his head.

“It seems like you don’t understand.”

“Eh?”

“Why do you all keep referring to yourselves as ‘dropouts’?”

“T-That’s because...”

“I’ve been holding you all in high evaluation.”

High evaluation? Question marks appeared above the heads of the girls.

“Just to let you know, I was the one who decided on the members of [Tomoshibi]. I scouted you all, for a simple reason. You all have limitless potential sleeping inside of you. The valuation of humans, the group they belong to changes all the time. At the educational institutions you visited, you might have been dropouts, but here at [Tomoshibi], you are all—marvelous.”

For some reason, the girls felt an odd sense of consent. Lily’s heart was filled with something warm. Thinking back to it, Ron had always continued to say it. From the very start—right as they met eyes in the entrance, he had praised the students with ‘Marvelous’. This man—was way too kind for his own good.

“Finally, I came up with the perfect method of teaching you.”

Turning his back to the girls, Ron picked up a small piece of chalk. On the empty blackboard right in front of him, he wrote with big letters, just one short phrase.

[Defeat<sup>7</sup> me]

As the girls were busy staring at these words in puzzlement, Lily was the first of them to grasp it. This teaching method the superhuman in front of them came up with.

“Now then,” Ron threw away the chalk. “The rest is self-study.”

1 Written as light, torch

2 Flower garden

3 Mostly active in clerical, administrative, and managerial functions. Steady income, unlike other collars

4 Kaede = maple trees

5 Difficult to put into the translation, but Lily uses a different Sensei from before, which sounds more like she’s ridiculing him

6 Back to the normal Sensei again

7 Can also mean kill or beat, but since he didn’t use an actual word for killing, I went with defeat for now

## Chapter 2: Coordination

On the 9th day after their arrival at the Kagerou Palace, on the hallway of the second floor—

“A-Are we really doing this...?”

“Of course. We don’t have any other choices left.”

Lily showed a rather concerned attitude, to which the black-haired girl stood strong, speaking with her usual beautiful voice. Even in the face of tension and danger, the girl’s beauty would never shake. She was indeed as beautiful as ever, but her cheeks were colored in a faint red, as slight droplets of sweat ran down her neck, making her look even more sexually desirable.

Then, a transmission came from yet another girl.

‘This is the rooftop. No problems here...Target seems to be in the middle of a bath. Can’t properly see it because of the steam, but there’s no movement...’

Lily went on to report the information she just received to the black-haired girl. She nodded, and gave the other girls on the floor, currently on standby, a thumbs-up.

“Lights, are we ready? Number lock, is everything prepared?”

After the final check, the girl fixed her hair, saying *The chance is ripe*, as she directed her gaze towards the bathroom. This Kagerou Palace has a large bathing space, and a bathroom, with the girls normally using the bathing space. But, they were heading for a different location. The bathroom used by the one and only man in the vicinity. From said bathroom, you could hear the sounds of someone taking a shower.

“0700, everyone, it’s time to attack.” The black-haired girl repeated the mission once again. “Attack Sensei while he’s in the bath!”

They were the newly-formed spy team [Tomoshibi], and their boss had conducted a rather illogical training method.

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The reason for this happened five days ago, the morning of the fourth day since Lily and the others arrived. The girls of [Tomoshibi] were flabbergasted, as they sat in the reception hall of the Kagerou Palace. In hindsight to the [Impassable Mission], an unbelievably dangerous and risky mission, Ron will be teaching them—or that’s what it was supposed to be, but Ron teaching talent, or lack thereof, became apparent, bringing the girls into yet another deadlock.

As Ron once again called the girls together, he wrote [Defeat me] on the blackboard, and walked away. This wasn't just on the level of instructions unclear. Only Lily had some faint idea of what Ron was playing at, having gone out with him the day prior. On top of that, she was the first to realize the change on the 'Kagerou Palace: Rules for shared-living', which had received some new rules.

[Rule 28: Those told [I surrender] by the Boss can acquire a reward.]

[Rule 29: During battle, no matter the time, no matter the method, everything is allowed.]

[Rule 30: Lastly, at least one attack every twelve hours is desired.]

"The hell is this?" One of the girls let out a voice of confusement.

Yet another girl felt the same, and could only repeat the rules in awe.

"Is this the new lesson he was referring to...?"

The final silent voice belonged to a girl with her characteristic red-haired bob cut. She held a long, slender body, and was 18. With her charming body, no excessive fat to be seen, and her calm and soothing voice, she gave off a fleeting, almost feeble impression. Just like a delicate glass framework, she could break if one used a rough hand against her.

"Maybe he wants to have us practice how a real battle would turn out...

Negotiations, threatening, and seduction...Creating a situation where you can freely control the target...it's all a necessity as a spy." The red-haired girl delivered an explanation.

The other girls might have sensed it unconsciously, but she was the one to finally put it into words.

"But, 'No matter the time, no matter the method', you know," the black-haired girl beautifully tilted her head in confusion. "Even if it's Sensei we're talking about, if we attack him seven on one, even he won't be able to fight back. We can even attack him in his sleep. Or put poison in his food so he won't be able to resist. Alternatively, we could find out some crucial weakness of his, and threaten him. This is a bit too easy, don't you think?"

"That is a bit rash..." The red-haired girl narrowed her eyebrows.

"What do you mean?"

"He is one of the best spies around, according to his own words, and what he has shown us...He perfectly knows what kind of measures another spy would use..."

The black-haired girl licked her lips, and flashed a smile.

"Ara, now that sounds interesting."

More than half of the girls had taken a positive reaction to this provocation of Ron. But, a small portion still hadn't quite accepted this yet.

"Hold on a second. Why are you all jumping in on this so easily." The white-haired girl spoke in a commanding tone. "I know that he's a crazy good spy, but he sucks as an instructor, right? You're just going to listen to him like that? I can't trust him at all, you know. We don't even know the entire goal of our team yet, remember?"

"Isn't this pretty convenient then?"

"Hm?"

"We will attack him, tie him up, torture him, and have him say 'I surrender'. With that, he has to give in to whatever we want from him. We can interrogate him, and ask for a different boss."

"Oh, that makes sense."

In contrast to the white-haired girl, agreeing along with that idea, the brown-haired girl still was not quite convinced.

"No no no, threatening him during class like that is a bit..."

"Lily already did some threatening in real practice, you know?"

"Lily-san did?"

"Not to mention, unrelated to any class or practice."

"That's just a crime, you know?"

"I just had him shower a bit in my poison that's all..." Lily scratched her cheek.

"Seriously?" The brown-haired girl was at a loss.

Either way, after a quick tactical meeting, the girls decided to go on the aggressive. As of right now, they only knew a portion of Ron's skill. All they definitely knew was that he had enough talent to be the boss of their group. However, if he didn't possess enough skill to be able to battle the Impassable Mission, then, just as Lily had planned, [Tomoshihi] should be disbanded.

Finally, the black-haired girl spoke up, showing an elegant motion as she lifted up her finger.

"It seems as if our plan of action has been decided. In my honest opinion, I think that this might be our chance. I'm sure that Sensei must be underestimating us. Seeing us as lowly dropouts! Let's teach him! Our own strength!" The black-haired girl raised a fist. "Let's clear this in ten seconds max!"

The other girls were equally motivated, raising their fists with an energetic *Yeah!*

On a side note, their first attempt really lasted only ten seconds. Right as Ron stepped out of his room, the girls each attacked him with training knives from the ceiling, to his left and right, as they ran towards him, surrounded him, and eventually got their legs stuck in wire. Every single one of them fell onto the carpet head-first.

"...This isn't even worth me playing along."

Ron just indifferently turned his back to them, walking down the hallway. Ever since, nobody complained about the new training method anymore.

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As Lily was busy reminiscing back to the origin of this entire situation, the lips of the black-haired girl were twitching. With a more attentive gaze, you could see traces of exhaustion even in her beautiful face.

"...Fufu, to make a fool out of me to such an extent...I will not give up..."

"Seems like you're starting to have grudges."

“Even though we’re attacking him every day, he basically just plays around with us, so of course I’d get agitated eventually.”

Five days had passed since the new attempt of classes had been established, but all that resulted was a consecutive row of losses on the girls’ side. Ron had shown absolutely no opening. Even as he was retiring for the night, he would rise as soon as but one girl entered the room. Even if they put up a trap in the hallway he would pass, he had always disarmed that in the matter of seconds. Even if they attacked him head-on without any pitiful tricks, he’d disarm their handguns immediately. Stalking? He would shake them off immediately. Seduction? The black-haired girl tried inviting Ron with *Sensei...won't you come enjoy yourself in my bed tonight?*, but he would arrive with a chess board, and after taking care of the girls hiding in the room, he defeated her in the actual game of chess as well. On top of that, every time the girls suffered a defeat, he would coldly announce *This isn't even worth me playing along*, only pissing them off even further. All this resulted in the girls’ starting to feel hostility towards Ron. —I’ll make him take back everything he said!

Not even choosing their methods anymore, they just decided to assault Ron during his bath time.

“But, lucky for us he’s just taking a bath like that.” Lily was a bit doubtful. In response, the black-haired girl pushed back her beautiful hair once again.

“Actually, I was acting like I was making coffee before, but poured it all onto Sensei.”

“Ohh, that explains a lot.”

“Fufu, men are simple. Right now, he must be having obscene fantasies about how to punish me for my clumsy mistake. His brain is filled with the appearance of me in a maid uniform as I apologize with ‘Master...I’m sorry...’, baring my chest, acting all flirtatious...”

“O-Okay? I don’t really get it, but it sure sounds like a grown-up plan.” Lily lost what the girl was playing at in the later half, her eyes just blinking in confusion, and a tad bit of admiration.

“Lily, don’t just believe her that easily. She probably has a completely messed up view on men.” The white-haired girl next to her didn’t hold off a much needed retort.

To that, the black-haired girl coughed.

“What about you, did you finish your own job?”

“Course I did? Already stole it out of his pocket.”

In a boastful attitude, the girl showed a key in her hands.

“Perfect~” The black-haired girl smiled. “I’m looking forward to this.

During his bath, the lights will go off, the windows closed off, and three people of the opposite sex will invade the room. He will be panicking, no doubt.” The girl sounded confident, as she spit out highly morally questionable words. “Ten seconds until our attack.”



Together with her words, the attacking team, consisting of Lily and the two others, closed their eyes. Your eyes get used to the darkness after around 10 seconds. Right after they opened their eyes, the lights in the floor and the bathroom went off.

—Operation, start!

The girls all began sprinting towards the bathroom. With their eyes already used to the darkness, they had their eyes set, and the white-haired girl was the first to jump at the door. The door was locked, just as expected, but she had the fitting key already in her hands.

“Huh?”

But, her hand came to a halt.

“Hurry up!” The black-haired girl stressed.

“The door won’t unlock...Weird, did I grab a fake by any chance?”

“Huh?”

“No helping it then. Time to break the door.”

“So crude!”

The white-haired girl sent a kick flying on the door, unhooking it completely, as it fell to the ground. Not concerning themselves with the problem of having to fix it later, the girls stormed into the bathroom, with it’s 10 meters in all directions.

Lily spotted Ron immediately, standing straight with soap in hand. Luckily, it was too dark for Lily to get a closer look on his crotch. Though she was a bit worried about the short time loss they suffered, Ron’ eyes shouldn’t have gotten used to the dark yet. But, it happened right as she wanted to move on to restrict him—

“Wah!” Ron suddenly screamed at a loud volume.

With the difference of him normally talking in a calm voice, the darkness around them, and the bathroom, letting the voice reverberate until their own ears, the girls faltered. Ron used this chance to throw the soap in his hands. With deadly accuracy, it landed at Lily’s feet, making her slip.

“Ehhh?!” Lily screamed, as her body was lifted into the air, bumping into the other girls, who screamed *Lily?! as they equally collapsed with her.*

They realized they were lying on the floor, but said floor was slippery because of the shampoo. After bumping into the wall at some point, the three girls tried getting up, but in the middle of this darkness, they didn’t even know in what position they ended up, their legs getting hooked on someone else’s, and once again collapsed.

“C-Calm down, you two!” The black-haired girl panicked. “The target doesn’t have any weapons, or clothes! We still have a chance!”

“—Marvelous.”

With much leisure in his movement, Ron approached the window. Through the girl stationed on the rooftop, the windows had been covered, which was now destroyed by Ron. Now, the bright sunlight entered the bathroom, clearing away darkness.

"I do admire your persistence. However, your scheming is still lacking." Ron turned around to face them, the sunlight illuminating his back.

Still completely naked.

"Treat your target like a wild animal. Meet it like you would be approaching a deer passing through the grasslands, observe it like you would be appreciating a squirrel making preparations for its hibernation. You're still not at a level where you could challenge the Impassable Mission."

"...Anyway, go and wear a towel," the white-haired girl spoke up in a commanding tone.

"It's just as you can see. A trained spy will not twitch even as he's being seen naked."

"Wear a towel."

"Rather, you should stop being embarrassed, and look at your heart's—"

"Wear. A. Towel."

Thus, Ron put a towel around his waist. For a second, Lily thought she saw a disappointed expression on his face.

"—I have several points of improvement, but the approach itself wasn't half bad. Come attack me again within the next twelve hours."

The black-haired girl let out a snicker.

"Ara, do you think you can run away? We did break the bathroom door, but the door to the changing room has a number lock on it."

"Normally, I'd be questioning you girls." Ron walked past the girls, putting his hand on the door to the changing room. "Luckily, I have the master key." In the blink of an eye, the lock was opened. Not that having a master key for a number lock would make any sense, but—Ron didn't deliver any explanation, and just stepped out, only to turn around one more time.

"Also, I forgot to tell you."

"Mm?"

"I don't mind the part of you attacking me for your lessons. However, make this the last time you attack me because of impure motives."

"None of us had any motives like that!"

Whilst not knowing if he was serious or not, the girls could only sigh in defeat, as they suffered another consecutive loss.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh! Why can't we win against him?!"

"I-I saw...Sensei's...Ah...Uwah..."

"Hey. Let me take commando next, I'll definitely make us defeat him."

"Gathering information has utmost priority. Unless we actually gather a valid weakness of his...It's way too scary."

The girls were conversing about their next plans in the reception hall. Sitting around a table, they were throwing attack and improvement ideas at each other. They had to save as much time as possible, as they were running out. Coming up with another plan of attack during the next twelve hours was a must.

Oddly enough, Ron' teaching style worked better than expected. Through the battle with a first-class spy such as him, the girls themselves were gradually improving.

"But, it doesn't make any sense. What was that just now? How could he open the number lock like that?" The black-haired girl magnificently tilted her head as she asked, to which another girl responded with an indifferent *Hm?*

"Are you talking to me<sup>1</sup>?"

The girl with her bluish-silver colored hair in absolute disorder showed an arrogant smile. From the view of the other girls, she was rather evasive and hard to grasp. She had a rather normal body stature, sixteen years old. She had proper looks, but not enough to make her qualify as an eye-turning beauty. Even with her special trait, her special hairstyle, she didn't stand out too much, seeming rather aloof.

"Don't act like this doesn't concern you...Weren't you responsible for the lock?"

"I don't know why. I put a number lock on the door. As long as you don't type in the six numbers, it should not open."

"...How about you just accept your mistake."

"Huh? Didn't the attack team mess up even more?"

"...!"

Although she was proficient in her work, she could be quite arrogant if she wanted to. As some additional information, she was the only one who opened the rare lock on their second day after moving in. Before the fight could heat up, Lily clapped with her hands.

"Alright everyone, what we need right now is teamwork, not some interior conflict. Your bonds with your comrades, you know? So let's calm down a bit. I'll give you one of the high-class financier's I bought."

"Ara...delicious!" "Oh, tastes great."

"Fufu, if you want one more, worship me as your 'wonderful leader'!"

"You sure get on a high horse quickly," someone retorted.

Though the girls didn't fully know the details, she was decided to be the leader. However, even if they asked her for the reason, the person herself—"Yeah, being the leader sure has a wonderful, admiring tone to it. It really makes me realize that the curtains have fallen for the rise of the legendary Lily-chan, fufu."

—Just kept grinning to herself, so they gave up.

Giving off 'the world belongs to me now' attitude of Lily a sideways glance, the girls went on for another strategy meeting. It was a different problem to discuss, with no clear and easy answer anywhere close to appearing, but they at least were passionate. Of course, a big part of this passion originated from the frustration and anger towards Ron, but there was also clear judgement found within.

A mortality rate of 90%—those numbers were terrorizing the girls. Ron promised they would be returning alive, but they had no basis to put trust into those words.

“All we can do is deepen our coordination.” The black-haired girl brought a valuable opinion into the game. “I don’t think we’ll be able to clear the Impassable Mission without being able to defeat a single man.”

“Hmpf. Well, this is all we can do right now.” The bluish-silver-haired girl let out an arrogant snort, agreeing still.

With an expression as if she had just remembered something, she looked over to the girl, sitting a bit further away from the table, comfortably on a sofa.

“Hey, you’ve been keeping quiet this entire time—” She called out to the girl—With her name. “Elna, do you have no opinion on this?”

Elna, the blonde-haired girl, slightly lifted up her head.

With dazzling golden hair, and snow-white skin, she almost looked like a man-made doll. Clad in a frilly dress was one of the reasons for that. On top of that, her never talking throughout the conversations made her seem even more like a doll. As a member of [Tomoshibi], she had spoken the fewest words. Being fourteen, she was the youngest. Reluctantly, she opened her mouth.

“—That’s not it.”

Those were her first words.

“Elna was constantly thinking about Lily-oneechan’s words.”

“Hm...?” Lily tilted her head in visible confusion.

“Talking about bounds and connections is just lip service. Elna and everyone else are spies. You shouldn’t trust anyone that easily.”

It was a harsh, yet straightforward way of phrasing it. In one motion, the other girls stared at Elna as a result. They couldn’t guess as to why you would bring words like these, able to destroy their entire team, at a timing this crucial. Their eyes filled with criticism and doubt.

“U-Um, do you want to eat a financier?” Lily forced out a bitter smile, feeling the tense atmosphere.

“Elna doesn’t want any.” Elna just got up from the sofa. “Taking a walk now, bye.”

Elna announced that she wasn’t planning on participating in the meeting. The group was now split between those members who stared dumbfounded, and those who were clearly displeased with this. In the midst of that was Elna, not stopping to bother with them. Not until Lily called out to her.

“Elna-chan, please put some trust in your comrades. That is what it means to be a team.”

The girl abruptly stopped, and turned around.

“If you trust someone, you lose. That’s what it means to be a spy.” Her eyes emitted a freezing-cold gaze.

After she was gone, a heavy silence filled the room.

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Elna snuck out of the Kagerou Palace, walking through the city at twilight. It was just an ordinary walk with no distinct goal in mind. Looking down at the steam locomotive from the bridge she passed, she was showered in smoke. Buying a crepe at a stall lined up in front of the train station, she rested her body in front of a street musician. With the 6 o'clock bells ringing at the church, her shoulders twitched out of shock, and she dropped the crepe by accident. The music box she wanted to put on for a change of pace swallowed the coin, but nothing moved, and she had to give up after hammering on it with no effect. It really was a walk with no apparent goal. In this world, two types of people existed in this world:

[The type who is sufficient after separating from people]

And.

[The type who regrets their actions after separating from people]

Needless to say, Elna belonged to the latter group.

*Elna said too much...*

She was acting all depressed on her own. Separating from the front of the train station, she walked down a small path.

*All Elna wanted to say was that [Spies should doubt everything], so why did it end up sounding this harsh...She completely ruined the atmosphere...*

Lamps were lined up on the sides of the main street, but as soon as one set foot away from that, one would be wrapped in darkness. All that illuminated the surroundings was the faint, dimmering sunlight. With dropped shoulders, Elna kept walking.

*At this rate, Elna will be isolated during the mission...*

She might have looked calm and cold from the outside, and in the eyes of her surroundings, but the owner of this personality was quite the sensitive person. On the same side, she had a weirdly high amount of pride. As a spy, being isolated inside the team was the same as inviting death. She understood that inside her head, but—

*On top of that, Elna ran away because it got too awkward...*

The walk was nothing but an excuse. She was too afraid of anyone talking back, and ran away.

*Elna has to hurry back and apologize...Apologize to Lily-oneechan...But, if Elna forces herself, **that** will get wrapped up in it...*

She very much knew the needed plan of action, but because of her communication disorder, her thoughts always run behind her mouth.

"What misfortune..." Elna muttered, saddened.

And, with that timing—

"Hey, little girl. Stop for a sec."

"Eh?"

Someone called out to Elna, to which her feet stopped. Turning her face towards the voice, two ominous delinquent-looking men, covered with tattoos, glared at her. They spread their legs apart as they approached her, sealing off any possible escape. Without her realizing, she had walked all the way to the port. She heard that the public safety was rather nonexistent

in the area where the harbour workers lived. The scent of alcohol and trash filled the air, as homes lined up along the pavement, looking about to collapse.

She had the information in her head. That a small group of runaway harbour workers formed in the area, and these men were most likely a part of that.

"Those are quite the bourgeoisie clothes you have there. We'd love to look at them for a sec, so could you come with us to the back alley?"

"No...let go."

She tried backing off, but another man appeared behind her, a group of hunters, probably. Elna cursed her own carelessness. To think she would be surrounded before she realized.

"Don't go resisting now. Just think of it as some good-willed help. Let's be friends, okay?"

—Friends?

Elna unconsciously opened her mouth to that word.

"Hey, Mister...How are you planning on becoming friends...?"

"Hm? Gotta show you by force, all there is to it." The man took out a knife from his chest pocket. "Look, little girl. You want to be friends with Mister now, right?"

The tip of the knife gradually approached Elna. For a young girl like her, this should have been enough to terrify her.

"What misfortune..." Her nose moved just an inch.

"Hm?"

"...Back alley...is this fine there?"

As Elna started walking domestically, the man showed a disgusting grin.

"See, we're perfect friends now...just like I said."

"....."

Though it was absolute chaos, there was also some truth in the man's words. Humans are an existence easily attracted to strength. In order to determine trustworthy comrades. Finding a person they can feel at ease around.

—In order to get closer and become friends, you have to show your own strength.

Once one realized, it was such a simple idea. It makes perfect sense. There was no easier method to it. Clear up the challenge your comrades were struggling at, that would take care of it all.

"Say, what's your father's name? Is he some company president? The member of a parliament? If so, do you think you could maybe introduce me to him?"

"....."

"Don't go quiet on me now, okay? You wanna lose those pretty clothes right here or something?" The man spoke up, interrupting Elna's thoughts.

She was now completely surrounded by the three men. She came to this back alley out of her own, and now she had no place to run away to.

"What misfortune..." She softly muttered. "Really, this is how it always goes in Elna's life."

She named herself in carelessness, but the men were too busy ogling her that they didn't even pay attention. Hence, Elna continued her words—to buy the time until that crucial moment. Her nose twitched again as it moved.

"Always get wrapped up in it, making their rounds. Accidents, screams, calamity."

"What are you mumbling to yourself—"

"But, Elna is slowly starting to understand. She can faintly grasp it. The places and time this misfortune occurs."

The time—arrived. Elna's sense of smell told her so.

"Codename [Gujin<sup>2</sup>]<sup>2</sup>—It's time to befriend and kill." Elna looked up at the sky.

The men around her followed this in a jest. Right after that, they trembled in fear.

—A rain of bricks came down on them.

Multiple tens of bricks in number, coming down like rain droplets. As the men were swallowing their breaths, not sure how to react, Elna already moved. At the one corner they were at, buildings made out of bricks stood, all of them old. At times, caused by wind and rain, bricks would fall down from the outside walls—Elna had caught onto this omen, whereas the men's legs weren't moving.

Hence, she arrived at the nearest safe space first, only to turn around towards the men, about to be swallowed up by this deadly rain.

"Goodbye, Mister."

She sent them a final gaze of contempt.

\*\*\*

The moment Elna returned back to the Kagerou Palace, Lily raised a scream.

"What's with all this dirt?!"

Elna's entire body was covered in dirt in just these few hours she had been out. The hem of her skirt had been ripped here and there, revealing her white thighs. She didn't seem to have suffered any wounds, but she was still in quite the horrible shape. As the exact opposite of the worried Lily, Elna couldn't be more calm.

"The same as always happened."

"Even if you keep it that simple, this is just..."

Before Lily could mutter her next words however, Elna muttered.

"Leave the next attack to Elna."

"Eh..."

"Elna is counting on your support."

Just leaving these few words behind, Elna went up the stairs, disappearing.

All Lily could do was watch that lonely back from behind.

"Is she going to be fine...?"



It was only meant as a mutter to herself. However, at her feet—  
“It’s not fine at all~!”

A voice was raised. As Lily’s spine straightened in shock, she looked down, only to be greeted by a small girl. She seemed happy, as if her prank had succeeded, as she showed a sincere smile. Her hair had a strong ashen-pink tone. Just as Elna, she was the youngest age with fourteen. Having her hair in waves, she constantly had a pure and innocent look to her. She had the loveliness of an angel if you turned her into a painting.

“The great me<sup>3</sup> went to the same institution as Elna-chan for a while! That is why I heard the rumours! That she’s an incredibly unlucky girl.” The girl jumped up as she explained.

Almost as if she was urging so much to tell someone about what she knew.

“Unlucky? Quite unscientific don’t you think?”

“But, it seemed to be true? A friend of the great me even got into an accident. Because of that, Elna-chan was sent to another institution!” She spoke quite gleefully of such a heavy topic.

This seemed to be the reason why Elna was treated as a problem child. Lily herself knew exactly how it felt, unable to help her comrades, just staying as a failure.

“Mmm...sounds pretty sad...”

“What does?”

“Eh, wasn’t this the point of the conversation?”

“Just listen to me!” The pink-haired girl jumped at Lily, whispering into her ear. “...If you spend time with Elna-chan, you will get wrapped up in an accident. This doesn’t make her a murderer, but more of a caretaker using accidental deaths. Isn’t this the ultimate type of assassination?”

Lily’s eyes opened wide at the girl’s explanation. It was so unscientific, but yet the cold truth. She calls forth misfortune, giving it to others—if that was actually the case, it would make her the perfect assassin. Not using any weapon, not leaving behind any traces, making it look like a chance encounter—and taking care of the target. With these thoughts, a cold shiver ran up Lily’s spine.

“An accidental calamity specialist—that is what Elna-chan is!”

The girl’s words were less assuring, more scary than anything. Just what exactly would she be able to achieve if she used this strength for her own desires—

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That day, Ron had stepped out of the Kagerou Palace. According to the information the girls gathered, Ron living patterns became more and more clear. Right after waking up, he would build up a sweat in the training room, followed by a shower. Once breakfast was done, he would basically spend the rest of the day reading suspicious documents and so on until the sun was setting, sending telegrams to the Spy Headquarters. After that, he would either step out, or draw paintings in his room. During the times he was out, he would be going on missions to clear them, in various locations.

Fundamentally, he was cooking his own food, using the Kagerou Palace's kitchen, and then eating it in his own room. Once every few days, he would go out into town to buy ingredients and any other necessities. Elna tailed Ron, and called out to him at a shop for art supplies.

"Sensei, what a coincidence..."

"Yeah, you're right." In Ron's hand shook the plastic bag he was carrying.

"Last evening, Lily tripped over my paint, and ruined everything, so I had to buy some new supplies. Are you alone?"

"It's Elna's turn to go shopping. The other members are busy planning for the next attack."

"Is that so, I'm looking forward to it."

"Yes..."

"....."

"....."

"....."

"....."

"....."

*So that's the end of our conversation...*

Even more than the silent Elna, Ron had always been the untalkative person. Hence, it came off as no surprise that no proper conversation was born even as the two of them walked next to each other. According to the plan Elna came up with, she had to invite Ron on a walk through town. But, the simple words 'Come with Elna on her shopping trip please' wouldn't come out no matter what. A crucial skill of a spy was seduction, but just negotiations like this were a huge step for her.

—At this rate, the target will go home, Elna panicked a bit—

"And what are you buying?" Ron spoke up first.

"Eh?"

"You were sent out to buy things for the girls, right?"

Urged by Ron, Elna had to speak.

"I-Ingredients. After that, some soap, and an alarm clock. Since the curtains were ripped a bit, some fabric as well. If she finds anything cute, maybe even a pyjama for Elna."

"Must be hard carrying that all on your own. Let me help you."

To think the target would offer a helping hand. Elna was grateful for this sudden development, and they walked down the alley.

*But...Elna is sorry. From here on out, Sensei will be wrapped up in her misfortune.*

Though she didn't feel too comfortable to use his kindness like this, it couldn't be helped. For someone living in a world where deceiving and being deceived was a daily occurrence, he wouldn't call her despicable. At the same time, Elna's nose twitched, as she realized that [Scent]. This misfortune tendency—actually originated from a psychiatric diagnosis. Ever since she was a young girl, she was plagued by continuous misfortune and unlucky events. She was born into the upper caste of the aristocracy, but the residence was wrapped up in a fire, to which she lost both her parents.

*Elna will overwhelm the undefeatable Sensei. Mess him up. Then, she will be respected, praised, and finally, be able to become friends with everyone—achieve her dream.*

*Codename [Gujin]—It's time to befriend and kill.*

*What misfortune...Elna thought to herself. Elna was wondering what would happen, but to think it would be a runaway car like this. Maybe she went too far...*

“Mm, that was dangerous.”

[illegible]

"You hurt anywhere?"

"I wonder. He shouldn't have suffered any grave wounds. Though I'd like to give him an earful, let's leave it to the police. Spies like us shouldn't stand out too much."

"It's just as you can see."

Just take a look at me, Ron probably meant to say, as he calmly walked on ahead. Rather than any wounds, there was not a single grain of dirt to be found on his clothes. The second he would have gotten run over by the car, he probably leaped off the bonnet of the car. If he had messed up his timing even a second, it would have been instant death.

Elna gazed over at the car. Just why did it spin out like that? What was that explosive sound that ran out at the second of the contact.

"I gave it a flat tyre." As if he sensed Elna's doubts, Ron started explaining.

"If it kept going like that, it would have resulted in casualties, no doubt."

"In that moment...?"

"You want to know?"

"Elna is fine, thank you."

"Just have to go bang at the tire, that's all."

"Elna didn't expect anything and was still let down."

As the two of them exchanged idle talk, Elna remembered why they were even here. The man next to her was a monster, greatly differing from any normal human being. Even being almost run over by a car like this, he wouldn't take any damage.

*B-But, the scent of misfortune is still here...!*

It wasn't the time to start feeling guilty just yet. Maybe a row of misfortune events could eventually hurt the man—

Elna's assumption was correct. Everywhere they went, Ron avoided any impending misfortune.

As they walked down the alley, a pot of burning hot water fell down from a stall. Elna managed to dodge it thanks to her premonition, but Ron was too late. Instead, he used his leather coat to form a lid and caught the pot.

Barely any water dripped out of the pot.

Once they reached the residential district, they ran into a ferocious large dog. Though they didn't know what they did to anger it so much, as soon as it met eyes with Elna, it bared its fangs, leaping at her, and the chains holding it back broke. With a speed clearly surpassing that of a running human, it would soon arrive at her.

"What an energetic dog."

Ron just softly pushed the palm of his hand under the jaw of the dog, which led it to become all docile. Luckily, because Elna didn't even have the time to run away, as her legs were shaking in fear.

Walking through a back alley, an equal event occurred to the previous day with the ruffians, as the bricks of an old building fell down. To that, Ron—

"Not good."

He let out an odd voice of humiliation, but...

"I happened to miss one."

It really wasn't that big of a deal. Of all the fourteen bricks falling down, he didn't manage to catch all of them—but that was the only failure. He even had the leisure to protect the girl clinging to his waist.

*This man...really is a monster...*

Elna glared up at him, but Ron' expression was as calm and collected as always.

As time went on, Elna started to get a bit depressed, whilst her target was as energetic as ever. Rather, he didn't even bother to complain he was wrapped up in this consecutive spectacles of misfortune, as he went on to help with Elna's shopping. He should have been limited with all the luggage he was carrying, but that barely had any effect.

At the same time, Elna had to become aware of a certain aspect again. That her own power was disgusting and repulsive.

*Elna really is a scary person...*

Normally, she wouldn't perceive a scent of misfortune this consecutively.

On top of that, whenever she would smell it, running away was that natural choice of events.

*It wouldn't have been weird for a normal person to get heavy wounds after all what happened...*

Every time she encountered this misfortune, she would fall into a hallucination, and she heard whispers directly in her ear.

—This tragedy occurred because of you. You are the one doing this.

This time she was lucky because she had a monster right with her.

However, what if it was a young girl like her instead? A member of [Tomoshibi]? Would they still want to be friends with her? No, what if this man found out about her own power? Would he just leave her side?

*Maybe just giving up on becoming closer with anybody might be the better choice...*

'You're better off not approaching that girl'

At the educational institution, who was it who spread rumours like that?

And, how long would it take until the others of [Tomoshibi] started spreading them...?

"Alright, this should be the end of the shopping trip."

As Elna was lost in her thoughts as they weighed down on her, Ron spoke up, bringing her back to reality. All the things she had to buy were already in the bag, and Ron was about to step out of the store, holding detergent in his arms—Even though she hasn't given her target any hard work yet.

"Y-Yes. But, there is still one place Elna has to visit—"

"Can we stop with the acting already?" Ron stopped his feet.

As Elna lifted her head in shock, her eyes met with Ron, as he gazed down. She could feel a chill run down her spine, cold sweat on her entire body.

*Eh...*

An insane amount of pressure hit her, as she unconsciously let go of the shopping bag she held, dropping it to the ground.

"Elna, I heard about your ability from the instructor of your previous educational facility. 'A girl capable of attracting misfortune', right?"

"...!"

"I finally understand it. The truth behind that warning."

He had known this entire time. All his actions so far were pure acting. He had already seen through Elna's attack plan. Most likely, he was just playing along to test her true ability. And now, he turned towards Elna, stretching out his hand.

The scenery of Ron throwing away the girls of [Tomoshibi] filled Elna's head. Reflexively, she closed her eyes.

—This is the end.

“You're just being misunderstood by everyone.”

The exact opposite of Elna's assumptions occurred. Ron just started stroking her head.

“This is your true misfortune. A girl with such resident talent doesn't receive her proper evaluation.”

“H...uh...?”

Unable to comprehend the situation, Elna let out a dumbfounded groan.

“Well done.”

In front of her eyes, Ron showed a dearest smile.

“You are—the luckiest out of everyone.”

Those words vastly passed Elna's ability to understand. Under this soft, warm hand, she remembered the words of a certain psychiatrist.

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[Alright, little lady, I'll give you the results of my diagnosis now]

[Misfortune tendency...let's call it like that for convenience, but such an unlogical tendency doesn't actually exist]

[Rather, it is closely linked to an intropunitive desire, I believe]

[The fire at your residence...I remember that. The only survivor of that was none other than you]

[As a result, you have this idea in your head that 'Me being the only one who survived is unfair', see]

[That is why you long for punishment. Unconsciously]

[People with this intropunitive desire often cut their wrists in this way, maybe closest in this case. Just how these people tormenting themselves with self-injuries to not commit suicide immediately, you also give yourself this repetitive punishment, but you won't receive the ultimate punishment, death. It is but a measure to give your mentality relief. You have an intropunitive desire, but you're not suicidal]

[Having survived this tragedy, I can save even more people than were lost that day...From an outsider's perspective, that wish alone is quite intropunitive]

[You can't keep blaming yourself. Because that will bring forth this intropunitive desire]

[However—You will most likely keep repeating that cycle]

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That was probably a logical explanation to Elna's ability. She heads towards misfortune herself. She seeks for this misfortune unconsciously, pushing her

reason towards that. Unconsciously, she seeks misfortune to punish herself, realizes this, and heads there.

He told her not to blame herself, but something would be off if she didn't. If she was only hurting herself, it'd be a different story. However, during these unfortunate events occurring around Elna, she constantly pulls the people close to her into them. Even if the person next to her was as kind to her as could be. Hence, she always thought of herself unsightly, as dirty. How would anyone like her be able to make friends at the educational institution?

With all these facts in her mind, she still couldn't comprehend why the man in front of her would pat her on the head this kindly.

"Thanks to you, a lot of people had been saved. If we weren't there, the car might have run over the other people. If we didn't walk through that alley, the pot with boiling water might have burned the people walking below. Same with the dog, an innocent child might have been in our place, getting mauled to death, or a woman suffering from the rain of bricks.

"Eh?" Elna let out a flabbergasted voice.

Most prominent reason for that was the man's words. All the events that occurred today would have happened even if Elna herself hadn't been present. If Ron hadn't countered them, there would have definitely been victims. Under Elna's guidance, Ron was saving people. It certainly didn't sound bad in her head, but—

"T-That was just all coincidence!" Elna tried to resist however. "A side product! Elna was guiding Sensei in order to damage him! Get him exhausted, so that the others had a better chance of defeating you! Saving people just happened in the meantime!"

She blurted out the entire plan, without even knowing why she had gotten this agitated.

"Elna is being riddled with misfortune, sinister, someone being hated! Not someone you'd pat on the head and treat like a kid! The only one standing next to you is a devil, giving people misfortune for her own benefits!"

"I was not once wrapped up in any misfortune though?"

"That's..."

"Mm, you have some dust on your hair."

With his usual carefree attitude, Ron brought his hand down on Elna's head yet again.

*Why can he just touch Elna like this...without any hesitation at all...?*

Panicking by this hand, she shook it off.

*He went through so much misfortune, and still is this considerate of Elna! He knows of her strength, of her evil intentions, and just stays calm like always! As if any ridiculous person like that would—*

"What happened, Elna?" Ron asked. "—Are you crying?"

".....ing."

"Hm?"

"Ing!"



"Ing?"

"E-Elna is not...crying...!"

"I see." Ron had enough sympathy to not point out the actual truth.

Realizing that herself, Elna had this warm feeling inside her chest.

"Anyway. Your luck, your fortune has saved the people of this country. I will give you a reward. Is there any place you want to visit?"

Elna shook her head sideways at Ron's question.

"How would Elna know that!"

"I'm asking about your desires though?"

"It's...her first time." Elna whipped the inner corner of her eyes. "Going on a date with someone, Elna never did that in her entire life..."

"...I see. Then, I'll be your escort."

Not declining the date, Ron started walking. He had completely forgotten about the attack.

The cake referred to by Ron as 'There is no better cheese cake in the entire Republic of Deen' had quite the particular taste. At first, Elna was a bit anxious at this underground membership system restaurant, but once she stuffed her mouth with the aforementioned cheese cake, her expression took a complete 180. Even while she was still living as the rich daughter of a noble family, she had never eaten such delicious sweets before. Before she even realized it, she had gulped up the entire piece. After Ron had finished his own, he ordered another.

"...When I was still young, I was taken here by my teacher. As a reward."

It was rare for the man to speak of his own past. And even a mysterious individual like him had someone he referred to as 'Teacher'. Feeling oddly happy about this, Elna started speaking as well.

"Really, Elna had to go through a lot of trouble! The first day she came to the Kagerou Palace, the locomotive got wrapped up in an accident, which led her to miss the next bus, and when she finally got on the right one, it got a flat tyre!"

"You sure can speak freely right now."

"Y-You pointing it out makes it only more embarrassing."

"No, I understand what you're talking about. In front of people I'm close with, like family, I can speak like an open book."

"We're comrades!"

As the two of them were having a comfortable conversation, Elna felt a strong stimulation in her nasal cavity.

—The scent of misfortune. A strong one.

Ron realized that something was off, and asked. "Something happened?"

"N-Nothing..." Elna hesitated.

*If Elna tells Sensei, he might go there...*

All the girl was able to was sense, or rather, smell where there would be some sort of misfortunate event happening, but she didn't know the exact details. Just this sense that it might happen to her. Normally, this [scent]

had a rather irritant odor, something she would never approach out on her own.

*But...it should be fine with Sensei, right...?*

She wanted to test it. If the person right in front of her eyes was a person who would stay by her side. It was a selfish and childish thought, she knew. But, the desire to test if Ron was a person she could trust was even stronger.

—In the end, he might separate himself from Elna. If not, she wants to find out as quickly as possible.

Elna cut her thoughts, and brought her body forward.

“Sensei, there’s a place Elna wants to visit.”

The two of them headed to an empty alley, storehouses belonging to the port lined up. The time of day had passed greatly, as the sun had set, the marketplace of the town closed, only the waves splashing against the wharf could be heard. The sea, which already had a dark blue tone at noon, looked even more ominous now at night. All the containers that didn’t make it into the warehouses were stacked outside, building a shadow akin to a castle. Elna held her nose with both her hands. A very distinct [Scent] assaulted her, the scent of misfortune only she could pick up. Her heart was beating so hard she thought Ron would be able to hear it. As long as there rose no need for it, the girl would never approach misfortune by her own desire. She had no idea what would happen from here on out. When she started holding her breath, Ron stopped his feet.

“Elna, I’m sure you already know—” He opened his mouth. “But we’re surrounded.”

She hadn’t realized at all. At the same time, several men appeared from the shadows of the warehouse. To be precise, they were eight men in number, all carrying handguns. All of them with fierce expressions on their face, not looking like a nice group of people to chat with.

“Who are you?” Ron tightened his expression.

One of the men, a tattoo on his face, spoke up in a deep, threatening voice.

“Don’t move. We have a hostage.”

“A hostage?”

“I know who you are. You are the rich daughter of this district’s congress member, and her bodyguard, right?”

Ron slightly tilted his head in confusion. “A rich daughter? You must have the wrong person.”

“Ha, I thought you’d say that. But, I already looked into it.”

The other men around them let out ugly laughs.

“The daughter of a Congress member wouldn’t run away to leave a citizen to die, right? No point in playing dumb. I have all the information I need on you.”

Apparently, this hostage was a certain citizen. Elna didn’t grasp what was happening, so she asked Ron.

“What is going on?”

"I don't know. Must be a misunderstanding...But it doesn't look like they're going to hear us out."

Truly, from the looks of it, these men were only trusting their own information. Fearful, Elna pushed her body against Ron'.

"...Sensei, can you take care of them?"

"....."

"Sensei?"

Ron let out a sigh.

"Yeah, not happening."

"Eh?"

"It looks like the part about the hostage was serious. We can only give in now." Ron' voice immediately cooled down.

Elna's vision turned dark. She hadn't anticipated this. This was too unfortunate. All on her own, she wasn't able to resist, and Ron equally raised his hand, showing no intent of fighting back.

"Tie them up with the chains," the man with the tattoo spit. "Their entire bodies, put a lock on it, and solder it."

At the same time, Elna didn't miss a faint breath leaving Ron' mouth. The chains the men brought out were around one centimeter thick. Tearing them off was impossible, no doubt. On top of that, they put a padlock on them, making the key unusable. Was it possibly just pure coincidence these men used the perfect anti-measures against Ron?

Pure misfortune—Elna only looked up at the sky.

All their belongings got stolen, and the two of them were forced on a car.

After a two-hour drive, they arrived at a small shack away from the town.

This would most likely be their hideout. No matter how they screamed, nobody would hear them. Ron kept quiet just as the men asked, not showing any signs of rebelling.

"You stay here until the Boss comes."

They were into the storage room of the shack, and the door was locked from the outside. Once they both sat down, they realized it was quite the narrow, confined space. With no windows, it was pitch-black. Next to Elna, Ron started moving his body, to which a guard gave a threatening scream.

"Move and you're dead meat!"

This storage room had a very small opening, too small for a window, where one man glared down at them.

"Opening up myself won't work, huh," Ron muttered. "I can't properly move my body, no window to escape from, and the guard has a handgun. Some communist belonging to a revolutionary most likely, but their handiwork is too good. Who are they?"

Apparently, he tried unlocking the padlock, which turned out to be a failure.

"What about the other members? Your plan was to assault me when I'm falling victim to fatigue, right?"

Elna shook her head.

"They took away Elna's communication equipment. She can't inform them now."

"I see. What a bother."

"Sensei, Elna is sorry."

What left her slightly shaking lips was an apology.

"This is all Elna's fault...Because she was guiding you..."

"Not quite. The men out there are at fault."

"Elna always brings misfortune to the people around her...Wrapping some up in her problems, hurting them...That's why she wanted to save as many people as possible...But in the end, she couldn't even get anyone to help her."

"....."

"Elna really would be better off all alone..."

This time, Ron got wrapped up because of her. Out of shallow anxiety, she wanted to test him. She bit her lip. She mentally prepared herself. No matter what she had to endure, she wanted Ron to come out of this alive.

"....."

Ron still stayed silent. Even as she gazed at his profile, she could not grasp what he was thinking about.

"You self-torture yourself too much. Let's break out of this situation."

"...Do we have any methods of doing so?"

"I wonder. I still don't quite know who they are." Ron let out another big sigh. "Well, I'll just use my master key. This situation is grave danger at all," Ron muttered, as he began moving.

Waiting for a short while, the door to the storage room opened. They were guided to the main headquarters of this base. At this wide open space, another ten dangerous-looking men were lined up. Right in the middle of that was a man sitting on a chair, having his subordinates serve him. He must be the boss of this group.

"Yo, been a while, hasn't it, little girl."

The face of the man was oddly familiar to Elna.

"You are from yesterday..."

He was the man who took Elna to that back alley. Now, his body was wrapped in bandages. From the looks of it, he suffered some grave wounds, but he was able to get out of it alive.

—What misfortune.

She had underestimated him to be just another small ruffian, but to think he was the boss of a group with more than ten people at his command.

"I heard you're the daughter of some important person around here? I was planning on just slaughtering you to show you how it's done, but kidnapping turned out to be an even better option, so we quickly changed our plan."

"That runaway car was..."

"I put out the order to kill a shitty grade school brat. But no worries, alright? I found some information, so I stopped trying to kill you. Rather,

we'll be holding ya for ransom. We can perfectly use that to fund the revolution."

The wounds apparently still tormented the man, as he stood up with a pained expression. He did say he wouldn't kill her, but his eyes were still burning strong with revenge against Elna. All strength left her knees. As the man reached out with his hand towards Elna, Ron hissed at him.

"Do not touch that girl."

Even as his entire body was contained by chains, Ron' attitude didn't change. He was calm and self-possessed, but he was emitting high pressure.

"Give it up. If you release us right now, I'll overlook it this time." He sighed, as if he was bored. "You're some small group of fries the police doesn't even have any information on, right? Not even worth bothering with your childish plays."

Ron' attitude greatly angered the man.

"Don't go playing cool now!"

He let out an irritated scream, hitting Ron in the face, who let out a groan, collapsing on the floor. From how Elna saw it, it looked like he had turned his neck to dampen the impact, but she couldn't tell for sure.

"We got plenty information of you as well, you know? Some crazy strong bodyguard, were you? But, being tied up by chains, the keylock even soldered, what will you do now huh? You're nothing more than a sitting doll now." The man kicked Ron. "How pitiful. But, don't blame me for this.

Weren't you quite enjoying your life as this girl's bodyguard? As the dog of the bourgeois!"

The moment he finished his words, he sent another kick to Ron' face.

Another painful-sounding groan escaped his mouth. It might actually not just be acting.

The man continued to kick Ron. Everytime, Ron grit his teeth.

"Just keep it down now. I'll seriously kill you off if you show any signs of resisting."

The man must have gotten tired, as his shoulders were moving up and down with heavy breathing. Giving Ron one last kick, he directed his body towards Elna.

This time, it had to be her turn. Realizing that, tears started building up in the corners of her eyes. But, right as the man took one step towards her, a forceful voice yet again filled the room.

"—I will say it one more time." Ron pushed his body up under great trouble.

"You...someone like you...has no right to touch that girl."

The man had a tired expression on his face, as he looked towards Ron.

"Do you even understand in what situation you're in, punk?" He sounded irritated for good now. "Change of plans. I thought of using you as negotiation material, so I wasn't planning on killing you, but I'm done."

"...Where did you even get incomplete information from?"

"Got nothing to do with your ass!" The man screamed, taking out a handgun from his cleavage.

His subordinates around him called out *Boss!* in an attempt to stop him. However, he didn't. Instead, he pointed the muzzle at Ron. Even so, Ron's expression didn't break.

"Is your source of information...a girl?"

"...!" For a second, the man's face twitched, unrest filling it. "I'll kill you" He put his finger on the trigger.

"Sensei!" Elna screamed.

Following that, the sound of a gunshot rang out, and Ron's body softly shook. The men around them bent their bodies backwards in shock.

"—Marvelous."

The bullet had been repelled by the chains, binding his body. While still being restrained, Ron lifted up his body. The men of the crime organization were watching this unfold with their mouths wide open, completely frozen. Nobody must have expected this.

"Right now, I am deeply moved. How many years has it been since my chest was pounding like this..."

Unlike what he was announcing with his words, Ron was as expressionless as ever.

"This is way too perfect to be a pure coincidence. For being just a mere mistake, you had perfect measures against me."

The boss of the group seemingly got a bit anxious, as he fired a second, and third shot. However, Ron blocked them with the chains yet again. Once all the bullets were used up, Ron spoke up again.

"Let me try guessing. Having failed to kill the girl with the car, let's see, you met a silver-haired girl, from whom you received information about the two of us in rumour form. You believed that, and decided to kidnap us instead. For the hostage...I'm assuming you picked a black-haired girl? And you heard the places we'd be visiting from a white-haired girl. I'm correct, aren't I?"

"Why do you..."

Apparently, Ron hit bulls-eye. The eyes of the boss opened wide.

Ron breathed out.

"I see, now that's something. In just ten days, you've greatly surpassed my expectations." His voice turned quiet, so that only Elna could hear. "Really, you're going this far? For one class—Just to catch me, you made a crime organization dance around in the palm of your hands? No wonder I didn't realize it earlier. These people have an actual hostage, seriously threatening us. What a wonderful method." Ron said. "There is limitless potential sleeping inside of these girls. It seems like my judgement really wasn't off." Unable to hold back anymore, the boss fell into a rage.

"What are you just muttering to yourself?! I'll kill you for real!"

He seemed to have given up on the gun, and instead took out a knife, approaching Ron with it.

"I just wanted to let you know." Ron just watched this with a bored expression. "—How long do I have to play along here?" He spit out.

Those words were the signal. The window in the shack broke at once, to which the men of the crime organization screamed in confusion. The ones who entered through the broken window were the girls of [Tomoshihi]. The silver-haired girl had a disrespectful grin on her face, running her fist up the jaws of the men. Following that, Lily tossed her poisoned needles at the men, all of them entering their world of dreams. The red-haired girl slipped through the battle like a dancer, hurrying to where Elna and Ron were located.

"I'm sorry, Elna-san..." She spoke with a quiet voice.

The girl took out giant scissors, **cutting only the chains** around Elna's body.

"You brought about even more fortune and good luck than anticipated, and after the first accident, we did a quick change of plans..."

Following those words, Lily and the silver-haired girl spoke up.

"Ah, I tried to stop them, okay? Didn't want Elna-chan to go through any sad happenings!"

"Don't just cunningly exclude yourself like that."

Ron cast his eyes downwards in a fed-up manner.

"Hurry and fight them off. Suppress them within two minutes."

With these words as trigger, the girls once again scattered throughout the room. The silver-haired girl beat down the remaining men with astonishing speed, to which Lily gave them the rest with her sleep poison. The girls must have been stationed outside as well, as Ron could hear gunshots and male screams. But, that quieted down in the blink of an eye as well.

Elna just watched the crafty handiwork of her comrades.

"Seems like I gathered quite the stubborn group of members, huh." Ron shrugged. "Elna, you should work together with your surroundings."

"Eh."

"[Tomoshihi] and I are the same. We won't die from a level of misfortune that you attract."

By the time the time limit of two minutes was passed, every present member of the crime organization was put to sleep, and tied up.

"I found illegal drugs underground!" shouted the pink-haired girl as she carried a big bag.

If they handed this group over to the police now, they would get arrested for sure. Now, the next problem was—

Still being restrained with chains, Ron was surrounded by the girls. In the middle of that, Lily puffed out her chest.





“Now Sensei! This time it’s our win!”

“To think you would go this far. I was about to be killed there.”

“You won’t die from a handgun, right~?”

This must be the entirety of the plan. The girls had to have caught on to Elna about to be run over by the car, realizing that this crime group was aiming for her life. Thus, they pulled a change to their next plan. After Ron was restrained by the group of men, they planned to take care of their group all together. Ethically and morally, it was completely messed up, but it was clever as well. Right now, Ron was restricted by thick chains, not able to move.

“Now, Sensei. A police officer should come here within the next five minutes.”

“So you already reported this. Quick handiwork.”

“Hehe, at this rate, Sensei will also be taken with them. A spy being questioned by his own country’s police, isn’t that really lame~? Well, if you accept your defeat, and lick my feet as you call me ‘Lily-sama’, then maybe —”

“Now then.”

A cracking sound like something breaking reverberated inside the room, leaving all the girls in confusion. As Ron softly shook his body, the chains fell to the ground, freeing his body. Flabbergasted, Lily picked up the broken part of the chains. With it’s one centimeter in thickness, it was beautifully broken in two.

“Um...these chains were made to hold back a fierce wild animal...?”

“Then prepare ones that can hold back a dinosaur next time.” Ron cracked his knuckles and bones, directing his gaze at the girls. “You still are no enemy for me.”

What happened after deserved no need for explanation, so Elna just closed her eyes. as the sounds arrived at her ears. The girls managed to resist for at least twelve seconds before they were all sent flying.

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That night, inside the reception hall of the Kagerou Palace.

“What do you mean we can’t defeat him after all that?!”

“The great me is also greatly dispirited! It was quite the daft operation!”

“That is our boss for you...Next, we probably have to involve the police, or else we will never beat him...”

The girls of [Tomoshibi] were sitting together, carrying out their almost daily reflection meeting. Slapping their hands on the desk, they discussed. This time, the focus was on the plan that even had Ron surprised, and how it still ended up in failure right before the finishing touch. They managed to tie him down perfectly, but he just broke their confidence like it was nothing special. The argument grew heated even further.

“It seems like we have to rethink the very basis.” The black-haired girl argued with her beautiful-as-usual voice. “Capturing the target proves to be

impossible. So does just attacking him. We have to find some sort of secret to threaten him with.”

“We decided from the very start that this won’t work?” The silver-haired girl let out a snort. “Not even your seduction showed any results, heh.”

“Ugh...! That was just a misunderstanding! There exists no man able to resist my—”

“You gonna play some midnight chess again?”

“It was outside my expectations! Coming to his room with ‘I can’t sleep...’ he invited me for some chess, to my ‘Let’s enjoy ourselves~’ he brought the chess board, and ‘Should I spoil you a bit~?’ he gave himself a handicap for the game! Just who is that man?!”

“Maybe just someone who likes chess?”

“Do you have any other ideas then? The target opened your number lock, and even broke the chains made for a wild animal, you know? How should we restrain—”

“Okay okay, no more fighting please!” As the discussion started to turn into an unfavorable direction, Lily clapped her hands, stuffing some baked sweets into their mouths to soften their moods.

“What’s important right now is teamwork. Bonds with your comrades. Take some special financiers.”

“Delish...”

“It really is delicious...”

“Phew, another job well done as the leader~” Lily sighed at her own success.

Next to her, the red-haired girl spoke up.

“Still...in order to win against that person, capturing him would be the most efficient method.”

“You’re not wrong, but...”

“Quite problematic...if we can’t even capture one male person, I can’t believe we will be able to clear the Impassable Mission...”

With these words, showing the direness of their situation, the reception hall was filled with a heavy atmosphere. Nobody had any words on how to proceed. Lily was the only one with a positive comment, but that didn’t change the fact they were hitting a wall.

“U-Um.” With a beet red face, Elna lifted her hand. “There was a reason he could tear off the chains!” She was left unable to control the volume of her voice.

As her lips were shaking, she continued her words, carefully.

“...W-When he was restrained, Sensei spit out some gem or jewel he was hiding in his mouth, and bribed the guard. Had him weaken the chains with the gun.”

“Ah, he did say something similar back in the bathroom. Like a squirrel preparing for hibernation...”

This probably came closest to an attempt of simplifying Ron' explanation. There were a lot of spies who hid weapons or jewels somewhere inside their bodies. He used such to bribe the guard, provoked the boss, and weakened the chains. Having him shot the same spot several times, even that thick chain would break eventually. And of course, Ron didn't forget to retrieve said jewel after the entire act.

"Jewels or resources, something to bribe with. A master key to open whatever lock you need open."

"Master key..." The silver-haired girl spoke up.

"Most likely, the method is relatively similar to how he opened the number lock. He bribed one of us, finding out about the numbers before the act."

"S-So one of us is a spy?" Lily was the one letting out a confused voice towards Elna's voice.

Albeit soft, gazes of suspicion and distrust passed through the rows of [Tomoshihi].

"Everyone here is a spy, you know," the white-haired girl pointed out. After this, the girls grew silent again. It was a matter they had to get investigated immediately.

"That reminds me," the black-haired girl spoke up. "There was always one person meditating when we were fighting over the key."

"Yeah! 'Only trust your comrades' and 'The bonds with your comrades', she emphasized the entire time!" The pink-haired girl continued with a pure voice.

Following that, the silver-haired girl showed a mischievous grin, as if she had seen through everything.

"Hey, Lily? I have a question..."

"Heh?"

"Where did you even get these financiers from?"

Lily stiffened up. Sweat ran down her forehead, and with a shaky voice, she muttered "What's important right now is our trust in our comrades..."

"""""""" ..... """"""""

Naturally, not a single girl present was naive enough to believe in that. Seeing this, Lily backed off, as the other members approached her, but she soon hit a wall, and started pleading with shaking lips.

"I-I just...ehmm, you know? I was asked by Sensei. To have a lesson where I would be the 'Lying one', with everyone doubting each other, see. Of course, I gladly accepted that! I mean, a situation where your supporter suddenly double-crosses you is pretty plausible in an actual battle, right?! That's Sensei for you! And praise me for going along with his idea! The self-sacrificing leader, ready to be hated for the greater good! I-It's not like I only did it for the crazy delicious sweets or anything?"

"....."

"A-All I told him were the numbers, okay? The bathroom attack failed completely unrelated to that! I didn't betray you enough to be scolded for it, I say!"

“.....”

“Let me repeat Elna-chan’s words! ‘If you trust someone, you lose. That’s what it means to be a spy,’ right! Ehehe~”

The girl’s quickly exchanged glances, wondering what kind of punishment they should bestow upon her—

“I have an idea.” The silver-haired girl acted as the representative as she spoke up. “How about we use Lily to our advantage? The target still thinks of Lily as an ally, right? We will use that against him.”

“R-Right! A two-fold spy! Now this feels like a real special lesso—”

“How about we carry that out right now?”

Lily’s expression froze up.

“U-Um...it’ll probably end up with me being beaten to a pulp by Sensei though...?”

“Go get them tiger.”

“C-Come on, there has to be a better way of using this advantage, right? I won’t betray you anymore, so...”

“...Hurry up, will ya?”

“.....Be right back.” Lily dropped her shoulders in defeat, leaving the reception hall.

A bit of time passed, until voices could be heard from above them.

“Sensei! I heard some new valuable information! Look at this protocol, come on, a bit closer...Ha ha! An opening! Prepare yourguho?! Paint inside this maiden’s noseeeee!”

The girls showed a satisfied nod.

“Elna-chan!”

There, the pink-haired girl jumped up with purity filling her eyes, dashing towards Elna’s side. Delightfully grabbing her hand, she brought her face closer. With this innocent smile, Elna was a bit flustered.

“W-What...?”

“You’re amazing!”

Elna was flabbergasted for a second, hearing these words. As she raised her gaze, she spotted the other girls all giving her warm smiles. Holding back her tears, she muttered an embarrassed “...Of course.”

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Time passed, and Elna made her way to Ron’ room. The first thing she spotted was Lily, tied up with string as she laid on the ground.

“Elna.” Sitting across the canvas, Ron spoke up. “Could you take out that small fry for me? I’d rather not put my hands on her.”

Just as she was told, Elna started rolling Lily, to which she started pleading furiously.

“Sensei! Please! I’ll do anything! If I can’t have any more of your financiers, I’ll go crazy!”

“You’re betraying us again?!”

“Hurry up and get her out,” Ron waved his hand.

Elna felt the same, and gave her one last push out of the room, closing the door.

"Do these sweets have some poisonous ingredients?"

"Of course not." Ron took out a plate.

There were several financiers, all radiating as beautiful as a gem.

"You want a taste? I'd like another 'Master key'."

"No thank you."

"They're quite delicious, you know?"

He brought the plate closer to Elna's nose. The intense scent of sugar assaulted her brain cells, and she couldn't hold back to grab one. The financier broke up inside her mouth, a sweet taste filling her mouth.

"Elna will betray her comrades."

"That was a joke," Ron said, as he handed her the plate. "Distribute them to the others. Disrupting the group won't help for the classes."

Ron might look rather plain on the outside, but he was a man of many hobbies. Chess, cooking, even watercolor painting.

Elna approached said Ron, and gazed at the oil painting he was working at. The entire canvas was splattered with red, revealing no proper progress. The only part sticking out was the title [Family] in the bottom right.

"You're not going to finish your painting, Sensei...?"

"Well...I did go out to buy some new paint, but the brush won't move properly."

A faint glimmer of sorrow resided in Ron's eyes. Although they weren't exactly acquaintances yet, the girls were constantly planning on attacking him, so they had a good grasp on how he was showing emotions.

"The precious residents of the Kagerou Palace, Sensei's family...?"

Ron's breathing stopped. Quite the rare, extreme reaction to see from him.

"To think you figured it out this quickly."

"There were many hints."

"How much have you figured out?" Ron crossed his legs, gazing at Elna. To that, she started explaining her reasoning.

"There were previous residents in this Kagerou Palace, and Sensei must have been a member of that spy team. Since they aren't currently living here, the team must have been disbanded—or even suffered annihilation. Most likely, this Impassable Mission [Tomoshihi] will challenge is—"

"I see, that is enough." Cutting between Elna's words, Ron nodded. "Your guesses are mostly correct. However, we're not at the stage where I can talk yet."

"Hm...?"

"Don't worry. I will reveal it in twenty days. I have no doubt that you will arrive at the truth."

Elna was doubtful why exactly twenty days, but Ron wasn't quite done yet.

"And then, we will challenge it. The Impassable Mission waiting for us."

1 Using Boku, the male version of I

2 Fool

3 She uses a very pompous way of referring to herself. I'll try to implant that as much as possible.

## Chapter 3: Amassment of Information

A girly scream rang out in the Kagerou Palace. Today's attack was conducted with a booby trap. For that, the girls packed the Kagerou Palace with traps. If the target managed to escape one, the second one would activate, and if that one was avoided, a third one would follow. A hell of wires that wouldn't seathe until the target was caught—or so it had been at the start, but Ron not only evaded all of them, but also used them for his own benefit. A harsh battle of traps broke out, with Ron being the overwhelming victor. In order for the girls to make out the respective traps they had laid out, they prepared passwords and left them, but those were all overwritten.

As a final result, the girls of [Tomoshihi] were all lined up in the reception hall, restrained with wires around their bodies.

"Ahhhhh, it failed again!"

Being in this miserable state, the black-haired girl let out a hysteric scream. Back when she first arrived, she had the image of a grown-up beauty, but the signs of fatigue were slowly starting to show.

"Ugh, I didn't think I was that bad of a good-for-nothing...I can't see even a small millimeter of growth...!"

"—That is not the case." Ron shook his head.

Normally, he'd give them substantial damage to the heart with 'Your scheme is lacking', and finish it off with 'This isn't even worth playing along', but today was different. Ron crossed both his arms, closing his eyes in what seemed to be admiration.

"Every single one of you got stronger. We'll soon make it into the fourth week, but you have shown considerable growth from the first day. It's just difficult to see because I am way too strong."

"...Really?"

"Yeah," Ron nodded deeply. "At the very least, strong enough that I can trust you."

The girls took in those words of Ron, looking at each other. Every single day they continuously attacked, receiving a 'Marvelous' evaluation from Ron, but it all just felt like he was making fun of them. The person in question had apparently meant to show admiration, but the girls just saw this as sarcasm.



—This might have been the first time he was earnestly praising us. With this sense of achievement, the girls reflected upon their experiences. “I guess we’re at the stage to talk now.” Ron sat down on a chair. “About the reason why I founded [Tomoshibi], and the details of the Impassable Mission.”

“I’d love to hear about that, but...” Lily broke between Ron’s explanation.

“Could you maybe take the wires off of us first?”

“What we’re going to steal is a sample of a biological weapon.”

—Not listening!

To think the day would come they had to listen to such an important talk with their arms and legs restrained. However, the girls had no other choice but to accept this surreal scene, and lend Ron their ears. Ron talked about a biological weapon but—The white-haired girl had a doubtful expression about that.

“Huh? Wasn’t the use of biological weapons prohibited by the international treaty?”

“But the development is not—they use as a convenient explanation, as the idiots of the army push the research. This was stolen by the spies of the Galgado Empire. According to the estimates of the scientists, it was going to take them around a year to figure out the ingredients, optimistically speaking. We have to retrieve this sample as quickly as possible, and if push comes to shove, destroy it.”

The girls all went *Ahh* in unison to that. The army and any sort of intelligence agency failing to reach an agreement was no new news in the world of spies. Often it was heard that the leaders of the army were trying to redeem themselves after having been invaded. As a result of this, the development of new biological weapons.

No matter what kind of proficient intelligence agency there may be, they cannot hold control and information on the entirety of the country. And the Empire aimed for that opening.

“B-By the way?” The brown-haired girl showed a nervous reaction. “What kind of biological weapon are we talking about?”

“You want to see a picture of the laboratory?” Ron took out a picture from his chest pocket.

Being shown this picture, every single girl present let out a shriek. The corpse shown there was indescribably gruesome. Unable to run away, whilst being forced to gaze at this picture, almost qualified as torture.

“They called it [Hades’ Doll]. To keep it short, it’s a homicidal virus. The incubation time takes around one week, going with a droplet infection, and 24 hours after the appearance of the symptoms, you die. It’s the embodiment of malice. Hand that over to the Empire now, who are willing to wrap up innocent citizens, killing with no remorse. If spies were to use this as an effective means of destruction, how many hundreds...no, a million deaths would result because of that? If this was used for military affairs, the

world would end, no doubt.” Ron took a provocative way of phrasing it. “Crazy, right? Makes you realize how much lasts on our shoulders.”

Millions of deaths—That might just still be humble speaking. At the previous World War, the empire was a royal family not hesitating to massacre a greater number of citizens. They were not hesitant in choosing their methods. The instant they used this weapon, the Republic of Deen would counter equally. They would continue to kill innocent people with this killer virus, and life would be a living hell everywhere. The damage truly was unfathomable.

The girls could only swallow their spit. They finally knew the meaning and reason behind the mission they would face.

“In the past, there was a team who challenged this mission before, called [Homura].”

“Homura...” The black-haired reacted the strongest towards that word. “I know them!”

“Oh? To think that information had been leaked already. It seems like [Homura] also had been quite inexperienced.”

“Inexperienced. It’s the strongest spy team in the Republic of Deen!” Suddenly, the girl’s voice drifted away from her usual calmness, and grew rough. [Homura] was the summit of their own country’s spy teams. It managed to evacuate several hundreds of thousands of citizens from the flames of war. The reason for the ending of the war was because of [Homura] as they handed over false information, having the leaders of the Empire’s army admit defeat—The girl was oddly informed, almost as if she had some sort of connection.

“I was hoping to become a member of [Homura], so I aimed to be a spy!” She finished her talk with that declaration.

Ron remained a cool attitude as always, even towards the girl’s passionate feelings.

“It’s a shame, but...” He announced, coldly. “[Homura] was annihilated.” “Eh.”

“Every single member died on the mission to take back [Hades’ Doll].”

The black-haired girl’s lips were shaking furiously. “You’re kidding, right...?”

“To be more precise, only one person survived. **Me, who was out on a different mission.** I was a member of [Homura].” Ron announced.

That was the first time the girls found out about Ron’s identity. He was a member of their own country’s strongest spy team. That would explain his immense skill and knowledge.

“This concludes the explanation. We will take the responsibility given to us by the country, and attempt the mission [Homura] has previously failed at. That is the entirety of this mission.”

Almost as if to say this was the end of it, Ron tightly shut his mouth.

Equally, the girls couldn’t muster any words. All they could do was wait until the graveness of the situation set in, their bodies freezing with fear.

They would be attempting a mission first-rate spies had previously failed at. It made them want to scream out their anxiety.

A mortality rate of 90%—this reality made it even harsher. However, they couldn't run away. The sight of atrociously deformed corpses were burned into their brains. If they didn't move against this, countless citizens might fall victim—

"If you want to run away, you're free to do so."

Right when their anxiety became unbearable, Ron spoke up. The girls' eyes opened wide at the unexpected offer.

"You're not related to this. Not to my revenge, nor the future of this country's residents, there is no need to risk your lives for the good of the other people. It's the country's, and my own convenience. Of course, I selected you all for a 'reason'. I want you to join me. But, I will not force you. I cannot force you into such a mission for someone else's sake." Ron rested his eyes over the girls. "I will give you one day off. During that time, you yourselves decide if you want to join me, or not."

Ron waved his arm once, to which all the wires restricting the girls flew off. As if to say that the conversation was concluded, he turned his back towards the girls. The girls were fully busy with gulping down the truth that had been bared to them. The amount of information was enough to make their heads burst. The contents about that Impassable Mission, Ron's identity, the final moments of the country's strongest spy team, not a single piece found a proper place in their heads, as if it was all just jumbled into one big mush, leaving them unable to move. However, there was one girl who raised her voice quickest.

"I will come with you." It was Lily.

Ron stopped in his tracks, turning around.

"Unexpected. To think that you would be first."

"Well, no matter how much I'd ponder about it, I don't think my opinion would change." Lily embarrassingly scratched the back of her head. "What about everyone else?"

The girls' gazes wandered over their comrades' faces, but none of them showed any signs of rebutting. Not a single one asked for the day to consider.

"So all seven of you will participate then?" Ron asked one more time.

The girls nodded along, returning a passionate gaze.

"Marvelous—Let's all make it home alive." Ron softly nodded.

\*\*\*

Ron was sitting in front of the canvas in his private room.

"....."

It was his daily routine. Besides his job, self-training, and all the time he used for the girls' training, he put it all into the oil painting, but he made no progress whatsoever. Even if he gripped the brush with the desire to paint, he didn't know how to move it along the canvas. Thus, the tip of the brush

would dry up every time. He knew better than anyone the reason for his slump.

The day the news came in about the annihilation of [Homura]—he had lost something precious to him. The painting hadn't progressed ever since. In the world of arts, there are those who draw with reason and logic, whilst the other type used their emotions and intuition, and Ron obviously belonged to the latter part. Once he stumbled, he didn't know how to get out of the slump. Rather, nothing inside him worked anymore.

He was oddly panicking. That showed how much this entire mission meant to him.

*The mission which stole my family...*

He was an orphan. Once he gained a mother and mind, he was already living in a town called Poverty Town. He was avoided even by the group of other orphans, his life should have vanished soon as he spent his days in solitude. However, he encountered Guido by pure chance, and was invited into [Homura].

'Ron—this will be your new name. I will raise you as a spy'

Once he closed his eyes, Ron could hear the man's words reverberate inside his head.

'A warm bed, food, and a bath. But most importantly, you will have comrades'

'Your comrades will teach you every possible skill and technique. Maybe a bit strictly, though'

'Every single one of them is an odd fellow, but they're all cheerful and good to deal with. One day, you'll definitely think of them as your family, how does that sound?'

It was just as Guido had predicted. For Ron, the members living with him at the Kagerou Palace were like family to him.

*No matter what, we have to clear that mission—*

Flipping pages through a bulky book as he reminisced, he indulged in sentimentality. Time passed, until a knock came from the door. As he responded, Lily showed her face.

"Hey, Sensei Sensei, have you thought of the plan for the operation?"

"Rather than that," Ron separated from the canvas. "Are you really fine with this? The time I first met you, you were announcing you didn't want to die. I thought you would be giving it some more thought."

"Eh, a counter question?" Lily snickered, as she sat down on a nearby chair. Recently, the girls were taking quite a lot of freedom in front of Ron. Since they were coming at him 24/7 with knives, they must have lost their restraint.

"Mmm, how do I say it...I can't put it into proper words." Lily scratched her cheek. "Sensei, don't be too surprised, okay?"

"What is it?"

"The thing is, I have quite the egoistic personality."

"And that is supposed to surprise me?"

"See, back at the educational institution, I was always egoistic with 'I want to flourish, participate actively! and 'I want to get pampered', but I didn't have any great goal in mind. Even as I came here, and started carrying the title leader, I was just using that to make myself feel better." Lily muttered as she looked up at the ceiling. "Recently though, if it was for my comrades, I wanted to be an even better leader..."

"Ohh...?"

As long as there was no explicit need for it, Ron didn't instigate the girls. Apparently, her heart had changed ever since she came here. At the same time, Lily's body shivered.

"Ugh...talking seriously for longer than 30 seconds makes my body all itchy."

"That's not a very good trait to have, you know."

"Anyway, about the mission and all. You don't have to ask for clarification this late into the game. It's tasteless." Lily acted bashful as she tried to cover it up.

Her cheeks were colored in a faint red, almost as if she was really embarrassed.

"...I guess that's also true. All I have to think about is the mission now."

His first pupil had shown considerable growth through the lessons she went through.

"You will invade the research facility from the east. I will do the same from the west."

"Hehe, understood~"

"Until we're carrying out the plan, you are to gather information. I'm having high hopes, Leader."

Those were the words she wanted to hear the most...probably.

"It's genius Lily-chan's debut then~" She muttered in a gleeful mood, leaving the room.

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A week later, the members of [Tomoshihi] departed from the Kagerou Palace. During their entry into the country, they split up into two groups. Ron and several of the girls acquired a working visa as artists, whilst Lily and the rest of the girls got a sightseeing visa under the pretense of being rich daughters, wanting to see a theatre live. Naturally, the passport was perfectly forged.

At the immigration check, they were heavily questioned. Reason for their stay, the play of their lounging, asked in great detail. Two people were questioning them, one belonging to the Immigration Bureau, throwing the questions, whilst the other was military personnel, keeping watchful eyes. This was most likely regarded as anti-measures for spies.

All of their luggage was thoroughly checked. If they hadn't prepared perfect lies before their departure, they would have surely been arrested right at their arrival. However, after half the day passed, and they made it past the border, it was quite anticlimactic as they could relax a bit more. There were

no signs of them being tailed, and they didn't have to go through much in order to buy the ticket for the locomotive. Rather, the employee at the shop was more than friendly.

The girls reminisced about the lecture of Ron', about their movement after they made it inside the country:

[If you move without hesitation, you don't have to worry]

Of course, this explanation was only met with a harsh rebuttal of the girls.

[In reality, once you make it inside the country, you can slip in easily. You only have to be wary once you get in contact with the VIP. No need to strain your nerves too much on the way there]

[Why would you...?]

[For you, who are drenched and molded by the world of spies, it might be a bit difficult to understand, but for the public, the war has already ended.

Though there are many citizens who still share hatred towards the enemy country, they don't think that war is still going on. No need for them to know that spies are fighting the wars now]

[That feels a bit lonely, doesn't it...]

[No, it's for the best. This is the [War waged in Shadows] after all]

After they crossed the border, the members rode on the locomotive. Next to Lily was a family seated. It made it seem as if they were on a way to a funeral, as every single one was clad in black. A younger pair of younger and older brothers from how they looked were gazing out of the window, their eyes sparkling.

To them, the world was at peace. They were living without being aware that the spies of this country were working in the shadows. Bribing politicians, giving money to gangsters, threatening researchers, the reality of them making murders look like accidents. They weren't even aware that a spy of the enemy country was sitting next to them.

—The world really is weird, Lily thought to herself. The existence she belonged to, called spies.

Thinking about it like that, the boy next to her separated from the window, and made his way towards Lily.

"Hey, Onee-chan, where are you going?"

"Hm? I'm watching a theatre play with my friends. It's a popular musical in the imperial capital."

"Woah! Where are you staying?!"

"Fufu, you're quite the precocious child. You can't just ask a lady where she stays."

Exchanging short words with the boy, Lily started thinking. That it would be nice if she could go on a trip like this with true friends, not having to worry about a mission. Forget about the [War waged in Shadows] like the child in front of her, just laugh without any worries.

As she arrived at the destined train station, she acted like she had lost her way, sitting down on a bench. Opening the map with another girl, a man sat down behind her, his back towards her.

“We’ll be moving separately from now on.”

Without making eye contact, the man at her back spoke up.

“We’ll move according to plan. Any last words?”

“That can wait until we meet again.”

“You’re right.” The man walked away.

Lily and the others equally got up, walking towards the decided lounging.

This accounted for the starting signal of the Impassable Mission.

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The Endy Research Facility was built at the outskirts of the Galgado Empire’s capital. As expected of the world’s biggest city, multistoried large buildings were standing all over the city. The biggest building of the Dien Empire was the National Diet Building with an overwhelming eight floors. Now, several even higher buildings were lined up next to the other. Maybe it was a distinct building style of the Empire, but each one of them had the form of a minaret. These large black towers looked about to pierce the heavens, ominous, and overwhelming.

Ever since the middle ages, it bloomed into becoming the capital. Being surrounded by sea and mountains, it has a relatively safe position against invasions. For more than a thousand years now, it is a city prospering through violence. The Endy Research Facility itself was built on a position where it could look down on this pincushion of a city. Namely, on a cliff.

No matter how you looked at it, it stood out way too much. In bad words, the ways of infiltrating it were severely limited. And this was the building [Tomoshibi] was supposed to sneak into.

[The sample of the biological sample is somewhere in this Endy Research Facility. The transmitter was destroyed right around there, with no traces of it being carried there]

The operation meeting was held right before.

[Our goal is to sneak in there, and steal the sample]

[The security isn’t any soft, I suppose?]

[On the outside, it’s just a medicine manufacturing research facility. In reality, it’s an institution which researches new-type weapons. As a result, the security is harsh. Military personnel are organizing guards, having them permanently stationed. We don’t even know how much information we can get before the actual infiltration]

[Is there even any opening for us to work with...?]

[Of course. As long as humans are responsible for the management, they show carelessness. Every single human has to eat, excrete, take a break, go home, spend time with other people. They are unlike machines] Ron spoke towards the girls. [You will break up in three squads and move accordingly]

[The information gathering squad—You will take coordination with other squads, gathering any sort of information]

Remembering the task given by Ron, the black-haired girl showed a charming smile. She was on stand-by at a night cafe. Having taken care of

her beautiful skin after the battle with Ron, she was on overwatch during the mission.

Being the most grown-up out of the team, as well with her good style, she was perfectly aware of how men were looking at her body. Her clothes weren't pompous, but neatly decided upon. They weren't designed to reveal as much skin as possible to the hungry men around her, but rather emphasized the slender, yet also well-proportioned. Thus, the one-piece she was wearing was perfectly right.

Right now, she was tasting a delicious iced coffee on the terrace of the cafe she was at. If she even slightly moved her body, the men around would throw quite obvious gazes at her chest. Using the mirror in her hand, she perfectly spotted a young man who was giving her a harsh stare. She yet again became aware of her own charm, and softly snickered. She was starting to get back the confidence she had lost through Ron's disinterest towards her.

*Normally I'd pour coffee on them, and strike, but...*

She remembered her fight with Ron. Calling out to him in the pretense of wanting to make up for her mistake—The enemy will become aware if you use such aggressive methods. Hence, she decided to lay low for a while. She couldn't rush this. If she messed up the plan right here, even only a tiny bit, Ron would no doubt get rid of her. She had to think of the target as Ron himself.

*The best course of events would be...having him pour it on me instead.*

Waiting for the moment the male customer stood up from his seat, around twenty minutes into her observation, she moved the glass on her table just a small bit, onto the corner of the table she was sitting at. The man's bag collided with it, pushing down the glass on the ground, a loud clattering sound running out. As a result, coffee had splattered on the girl's clothes. "Ahh, I'm sorry! I'll compensate for it!"

The man panicked even more than imagined, panicky gathering the pieces of glass. Following that, the girl grabbed his hands.

"Careful. You can't just pick up broken glass like this, you know?"

By grabbing the man's hand, his face turned as red as a tomato. He must have barely had any experience at dealing with women. He had no hopes of opposing the girl.

"Ah, I'm sorry. S-Suddenly grabbing your hand like this," She acted clumsily, apologizing. "But...you have a wonderful hand. An artisan?"

"N-No, just an average researcher..."

"Amazing! So an intellectual!"

Being showered with fake praise, the man scratched his cheek. Unlike Ron, the beauty of the girl, as well as the sudden skin contact made his head unable to work properly. And the girl wasn't quite done yet.

"Fufu, Onii-san, this western dress is pretty expensive, you know? Are you going to pay me back?"

"E-Err...that's..."



"I was ditched by my date, you know. How about you join me for dinner?"  
As the girl asked with a smile, the man gave an awkward nod.

[The peculiar deeds squad—With your skills, you will support the squads]  
Walking along a road at the outskirts of the capital, the blonde-haired girl, Elna, was humming to herself. It had just stopped raining that night. The bright moon slightly illuminated the darkness she wandered, but it still wasn't bright enough to clearly see. Only able to see around 1 metre in front of her, she almost tripped several times. On top of that, she tried to warm her cold hands with a warm breath. All around her were fields, not a single residence-like home at all. Only from time to time, a car with its headlights pierced through the darkness.

As her nose suddenly twitched, she made sure that her surroundings were in no danger, and jumped in front of a car. Together with the scream of the driver, the sound of the horn rang out, but Elna had already collapsed on the ground.

"Y-You okay?" A woman jumped out of the stopped car.

Realizing that her clothes hadn't been as dirty as they should have, Elna quickly put some mud on her skirt, faking some tears.

"I-I was so scared...I was taking a walk...until it suddenly got dark, and now a car came, so I just..."<sup>1</sup>

The woman was still a bit flustered, but promised to bring Elna home to her house. Having her sit down on the backseat, she started the car. She must have felt pretty bad towards the dirty girl. Elna had a bit of guilt inside of her for deceiving her like this, but this wasn't the time to play moral inspector.

"Turn right there!" Elna gave directions, and the woman frantically turned the steering wheel, only for it to get stuck in a muddy road.

The right front wheel got stuck, and stopped moving. A street being under maintenance, especially in the suburbs, was no rare occurrence. Especially with the previous rainfall. Hence, even after pushing the gas a few times, the car wouldn't move.

"I'll go push the car, so could you hold the steering wheel?" The woman advised.

As soon as the woman got off the car, Elna stuck up on the driver's seat, looking through any sort of paper she found with a complete deadpan expression. Right as soon as she found an envelope hidden in a small opening, the car escaped from the mud puddle. Relatively quickly as they made it down to the residential district of the city, Elna asked the woman to let her off at a corner.

"Thank you, Onee-chan!" she waved her hand, as the woman drove away. Once the car was out of sight, another girl appeared from the shadows of a building, a brown-haired girl. With her usual worried gaze, and lifted eyebrows, she calmly observed Elna. However, as she spotted the envelope in Elna's hands, she let out an *Ohh!* of admiration, to which Elna handed the

envelope over. Her kind smile disappeared, as her expression changed into one of a calm and collected spy.

“...Deliver this as quickly as possible to the information gathering squad.”

“What kind of material are we talking about here?”

“The Onee-chan just now was actually a supporter of the Republic of Deen. She gave them important information for many years, but—”

She opened the envelope. In there were orders of the Empire’s army.

“She changed sides to the Empire. If we accepted her orders without doubt, it could become really dangerous.”

“Oh man~ I guess they should have been doubtful of their allies as well.”

“...It’s fair play. Spies are fine as the cowards they are.”

“Well, there are people who would betray their comrades for a piece of sweets.” The girl commented, as she whistled through her fingers. “My preparations for the transfer are complete. It should maybe take 10 minutes for 10 kilometers.”

Elna was a bit suspicious at first, but right after the girl’s words, a falcon came descending to the two of them. Because it bumped into Elna’s head on the way there, she cursed with her usual *What misfortune...*, falling backwards. After the falcon put the envelope into its beak, and with a speed of around 80 km/h, it disappeared into the night sky.

[The action squad—will use the information we have gathered, and get into contact with our VIP]

With commanding, confident footsteps, the white-haired girl walked down the big street. In order to not stick out too much, she had her head cast downwards, but coercive sharp gazes came flying from everywhere. As they were approaching noon, the labourers with their lunch boxes out were starting to get more noisy.

“I wish I got some lunch as well~” The silver-haired girl next to her, Lily, spoke up with one hand on her stomach.

“Keep that for later...” The white-haired girl pointed out in an exasperated tone, as a large statured man walked towards them.

Their current target. Wondering if it had would be better to give Lily a signal, a rumbling from Lily’s stomach filled the silence. Apparently, she really had been hungry. She even kept walking without any care in the world.

“Hya!”

She thrust her head right into the man’s body.

“What’s wrong with you?!” Naturally, that earned her a fierceful groan from the man.

Not able to win in a battle of size, Lily fell over the second they touched each other. Holding her head with one hand, she forced out a meek “I-I’m sorry!”—The people around them started to watch over the situation with worried gazes. Presumably unable to stand this, the man clicked his tongue, and walked away, to what Lily sighed.

“Phew, that was scary.”

"How about you don't stand out too much?" The white-haired girl flicked Lily's forehead.

"Ouch...And, the result?"

"What do you think?" grinned the white-haired girl, opening the bag she had on her shoulder.

In there was the wallet she had stolen from the man a second ago. As he was focussed on Lily, she took that chance.

"Just to make sure, but you got the real one, right?"

"Of course. You think I'd fall for a fake one?"

"You did with Sensei, 24 times to be exact."

"Well not anymore okay? See, as he bumped into you, he didn't hold his hip pocket, but at this chest. The one at this butt must be a fake, and this is the real deal."

The two girls separated from the big street as they talked, walking down a back alley.

"Let's split up at the hotel then. That blockhead was a seller of the drug. In his wallet was a list with buyers. According to the information gathering squad, there's even researchers on that list."

"It'd be great if we could just report them right now."

"Use them as much as you can, you know?"

In response to the white-haired girl's words, Lily started humming.

"I was a bit worried at first, but I guess I've grown considerably!"

"Well of course. Although it was just one month, we've been through some crazy trai—"

The two of them were matching their gazes with full-fledged smile as—

"You two over there! Stop right now!"

A sharp voice called out to them from behind. Turning around, the two groaned as the natural enemy of the spy appeared—the police. Two police officers were blocking off their escape route.

"Show me the contents of your bag. And don't think about moving."

"Umm...we are just two normal tourists though?"

"Sorry about this, but pickpocketing happens frequently in this place, so I'll have to ask you to cooperate."

The white-haired girl's attempt of talking her way out of it failed.

"Why did you choose a place with lots of pickpocketing?" Lily blamed her in a quiet voice.

"Because you asked for a place where we could eat some dinner, you know," the white-haired girl returned a glare.

In the worst case, they had the choice of beating down the police officers, but they would have rather avoided that. Hence, the white-haired girl just handed over the bag without resistance. The officer didn't hold back at all, as he opened the bag with a knife. With that, a double layer to hide anything wouldn't work. He would be able to find the wallet right away like this, so the girls were already working on an excuse.

"—Alright, no problems here."

Their worry was blown away however, as the police officer quickly gave up. Neither from their clothes, nor the bag, he didn't spot the wallet. After they walked away again, Lily tilted her head in confusion.

"Eh, where did you hide the wallet?"

"No idea."

"Heh?"

"The wallet I stole disappeared." The white-haired girl had a frustrated expression as she bit her lip. "Someone stole the wallet I stole—there's only one person able to pull off something like this."

The girl remembered. At the operation meeting, Ron had given them equal roles, and finished with the following words.

[I will—act as backup for all the groups]



At the same time, a single man passed by the two of them. Wearing quite the wealthy-looking business suit, it seemed to be a gentleman of older age. It was a perfect disguise. The man minimally opened up the collar of his clothes. Showing only the girls the wallet, he disappeared into the back alley.

Saying everything worked flawlessly would be an overstatement. However, the girls of [Tomoshibi] showed great work nonetheless.

On a side note, the details of the operation were decided as follows.

[To be precise, the information gathering squad will be acting like a beautiful blooming rose, the action squad will be dadada bustling about, and the peculiar deeds squad will act like you're loving a small bird—]

[.....]

As the girls met Ron's gaze with cold, dead eyes, he swiftly stopped his words.

[—That was a joke]

Not a single girl laughed. They were just relieved from the bottom of their hearts. What would they have done if he was serious?

[You will decide on the details yourselves] Ron looked at them with a soft gaze. [I'll give the course of action, as well as the check. But, I'll leave the detailed procedure to you]

[Eh...is that really okay?]

[You can do it, right? You've been doing it for the past month, haven't you] Quite the inciting words to bring at a time like this, but it made sense for the girls, who shared gazes for a second, before the black-haired girl spoke up with a charming voice.

[No need to worry. I'll come up with the perfect plan to leave you speechless]

[—Marvelous]

Those words turned into the signal, as the girls put down a map on the table, surrounding it. How could they deceive the enemy, who would get in contact with the target. Once one girl brought up an idea, another two argued against, a third gave a slightly change to the original, and the fourth fought. Most of the arguments basically rounded about to *It didn't work against Sensei*, so they threw them out again. All they were aiming for was a plan even Sensei would be deceived by.

After all, the results of last month's training were being tested.

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That night, as Ron was reading a newspaper at the hotel he stayed at, a knock came on the door.

"I have come to deliver the wine you ordered..."

Ron opened the door, and was greeted by a young man carrying a bottle. As he invited him in, he put on some music. A necessary procedure to not let anyone pick up on the details of what they were talking about. The boy let out a long breath of relief, pulling off what looked to be a face mask. What

was revealed beneath that were calm eyes, and red hair. She was a part of the information gathering team.

"The disguise was perfectly done. However—" Ron accepted the bottle.

"Was there really a need to wear a mask?"

"I am a bit sad to wear male clothing alone in front of Boss..."

"...If you wanted to do it, then it's all fine with me."

He felt like the girl was oddly idolizing him. Ron however didn't investigate that further, and just asked her to not call him Boss instead. Tearing off the label on the wine bottle, he found the password he was looking for, as well as the information they've gathered. Just by one gaze, he could make out their continuous effort and results.

The red-haired girl showed a dignified bow.

"We have confirmation that Hades' Doll has not left the research facility... However, intruding the facility might prove difficult...it's stationed at a remote place, with guards on the lookout around the clock. The deepest layer is locked off, and unless you have the permission to enter, even a disguise will prove impossible...Openly infiltrating is the only other option so far, so if we don't take some more time. then—"

"No, if we take any longer than this, the Empire might finish analyzing the biological weapon. We can't relax like that."

"However..."

"I wasn't just slacking off, you know."

Ron lifted up the bed equipped in the guest room. Beneath that, a large amount of documents and IDs were sewed on. Enough to completely fill this one side of the bed. Crime register of people involved with the research facility, family register, time of completed construction for the facility, connected politicians, personnel records of the army personnel, even documents concerning the financial situation.

"All of this on your own...?"

The red-haired girl was flabbergasted as her eyes blinked frantically. She could only gaze at Ron in admiration.

"That is what I expected...Such proficient work...so reassuring..."

"Proficient, huh...Well, I am the world's strongest spy, so something of this level should be expected—" Ron cut his words, and looked up at the ceiling.

"—Could you give me some more time?"

The red-haired girl blinked yet again at those words.

Ron stepped out into the city at night. It was an unplanned outgoing, but his legs just moved. If one asked for his motivation, he would call it a whim. He surely wasn't good at explaining his own movements. He felt a worrisome breeze, he would most likely say.

*...I'm not perfect at all. It just looks that way to them.*

The reason he ended up as he was now was because of all the techniques and skills hammered into him by [Homura]. Back when [Homura] was freshly founded, Ron had even less than the girls had now. He was just lucky enough to receive personal lessons from the spy team representing

their own country, and built his own repertoire. He continued continuous days of failure and harsh lessons. Especially under the guidance of Guido, he had to eat dirt countless times.

[Helpless during battle, huh. No signs of you winning against me, boy]

No matter how many times he challenged him, he couldn't reach his teacher Guido. If he came at him with his fist, he was easily countered and thrown to the side.

[0.1 seconds too late—The same, no matter you do]

[How about you take some guidance from someone else but me. About negotiations or disguises. Spies aren't exactly made to be exceptional in battle]

[You learned everything besides battle by intuition? Moron, learn the logistics behind it]

[One day, you'll be the one teaching. Once that time comes, you have to do your utmost so your pupil doesn't die]

[No interest in that? ...Huh, alright then. I'll beat you to a pulp until you're satisfied]

In the end, Ron was unable to win even a single time. No matter how many hundreds of times he challenged Guido, he could never reach him.

*I couldn't fill that 0.1 second...I'm far from being proficient. I'm still in a constant learning process...*

As Ron arrived at a public park, he sat down on the edge of the water fountain. During that night, people were passing through the park as they presumably went home from a party, their faces red from the alcohol, humming to themselves as they enjoyed their lives. This party still seemed to continue, as Ron heard sounds of a violin being played in the distance. That mixed up with the soft sounds of the water flowing behind him, and he closed his eyes to take it all in.

"Hey, you sure are good-looking. Onii-san, how about it? One round is three bills."

A prostitute. Ron must have been misunderstood as a lonely single man. As he looked at the direction the voice came from, Elna moved with a wriggling body.

"...I'll have to pass."

"If you don't, then the plan of 'A spy acting as a prostitute to deliver information' will be ruined."

"Then go with a different plan."

The worst possible plan for someone who was under Ron's guidance. But, Elna didn't pay too much mind to it, sitting down right next to him. Even after Ron advised her to take some distance to make them look less suspicious, Elna just snuggled up even closer.

"...Even if it's just a chance meeting, spies aren't supposed to get in contact this much. Why did you think I gave the information gathering squad a means of transmission?" He told Elna in a quiet voice, but she showed no signs of separating.



"Elna came to bring something the transmissioner can't deliver."

"What is it?"

"A heartfelt appeal."

—What is this girl talking about?

Ron thought of commenting on that, but gave up, in the fear of hurting the girl.

"Are you...nervous?" Elna turned to Ron with worry in her eyes.

Her eyes had seen through him. Her doll-like eyes started to get damp.

Apparently, the girl had seen through his anxiety and shaken heart. Though he couldn't accept his subordinates seeing through his heart, declining this act of kindness was equally unacceptable.

"Before I reveal that...Let me tell you my real age."

"Please do."

"It's just as you can see."

"28!"

".....I'm 20."

He was always told he looked older than he actually was. It didn't hurt him anymore. By any means.

"...You're much younger than Elna thought." She was astonished.

The oldest member of [Tomoshihi] was 18, so there was but a small two-year difference between her and the boss.

"That's why I'm still a bit worried. It's the first time someone else's life was ever in my hands. Unlike my own life, which I've wagered countless times so far."

"....."

"My inexperience might kill my subordinates...just thinking about that makes me scared...What a pathetic story, I know."

He couldn't allow any other girl to hear these weak words. He was angry at himself. Elna on her end just softly put her hand on Ron's.

"Elna is really bad with words...so she can't come up with anything good to say here..."

Ron was captured by her clear gaze.

"That's why, until those worries and anxiety are gone...she'll hold your hand like this..."

Though he wasn't at the age where normal hand-holding would suffice to calm him down, her earnest feelings were transmitted to the warmth her hand gave off. Through this, he felt his feelings become a bit lighter. Elna might have picked up on that, as she eventually disappeared into the night again, showing a satisfied smile until the very end.

The night after that, whilst Ron was busy creating some encoded text for passwords, a knock came from the door. Before answering, Ron checked the time; perfectly 9pm. Every single day, she would arrive perfectly on the second. As always, he put on the music as an anti-surveillance measure. Shortly after that, he heard the familiar red-haired girl's voice.

"...Boss, I brought the wine you've ordered..."

He almost dropped his pen. He rushed over towards the door, inviting the girl in, yet again disguised as a young man. The girl peeled off the face mask, whilst Ron gazed at her with a blank expression.

"Don't call me [Boss] in front of the room like that. Why do you think we had you act as a wine shop employee."

"Ah, apologies, Boss..."

"And don't call me Boss inside the room either. If you dislike calling me Sensei, then at least call me Ron."

The red-haired girl lowered her gaze.

"But, I want to call Boss with [Boss]..."

"What a thick-headed one you are."

That being said, he didn't want to be called Boss for his own convenience, so seeing her this adamant, he could only give in. After they finished their regular exchange of information, the girl returned to her usual calm and collected attitude.

"Can I ask one thing...?"

"What is it?"

"The day before we start carrying out the operation...Lily-san sounded out she wanted to conduct a kickoff party..."

"....."

He thought he heard a joke. Ron had to rub his gabella.

"Boss?"

"No, I must have misheard something. Something about a kickoff party? You're thinking about gathering spies who are planning to infiltrate a research facility to get dinner together?"

"That is what she said, yes."

"Deny that immediately..."

A kickoff party for spies was never heard off before. If even one person were to be tailed at that time, the entire group would be marked. Even if one person were to be marked at that time, other team members would be safe because they were going after other jobs. Gathering would work perfectly against that.

"Make her give up on it. This is unprecedented."

"Lily-san has already started listing up several first-class restaurants..."

"I wish I had her mental strength sometimes."

"From the looks of it, she wants to take off a bit of exhaustion off everyone after their hard work, and celebrate..."

Now that made more sense. Unlike him, this was the girl's first mission. No wonder they must be tired from all of this. Even with the red-haired girl in front of him, there was barely any vigor in her voice left. That would explain the mistake of calling him boss without being aware of her surroundings.

"—Alright. I'll teach you about a store under personal support of the intelligence agency. Go ahead and use that. But don't be negligent of your surroundings."

Ron gave in, but the red-haired girl shook her head.

"No, if it's just us, in the one in a million chance that something might go wrong..."

"Then cancel it."

"That would be settled if Boss were to join us..."

"....."

To think he would be asked to act as a bodyguard. However, her argument in itself was valid. This was indeed the best choice.

"...I guess taking care of my subordinates is also part of a superior's job."

Ron sighed, and covered his face with one hand. "I will go take care of the place. Guess I'll do some reconnaissance while I'm at it..."

Hearing Ron's agreement, the expression of the red-haired girl bloomed, and she lowered her head.

Although they spoke unconditionally of spies, there existed a wide shape and form of them. There were those like Ron and the others, acting as civil worker-like spies for the state, supporters and cooperative workers working in a different country to pass off information, employment of intelligence agencies under the use of a reward, or even concealed spies, living their days as normal residents in another country. The place chosen for the kickoff party was owned by a restaurant owner who had a certain level of distrust towards the Empire. They weren't exactly conducting any spy activities, but he would still hold their secret in case something happened. Ron went on to reserve a single room. Making sure that he wasn't tailed, or the owner having turned on him, he entered the room a bit belated. Though he was a bit dubious if that much effort really was necessary for a small dinner like this.

"Been a while!"

Right as he entered, Lily immediately greeted him with a waving hand.

"...Lily, do you have anything to say after forcing me to go through all of this?"

"No problem?"

She received a finger flick on the forehead, letting out a *My skull!* groan as she held her head. Following that, Ron made his way to his seat, and looked at the girls' faces around him. It's been two weeks since they had seen each other in person like this, but their expressions looked a bit stiff. Though their innocent features were still clearly visible. As the food was carried in, the kickoff party finally began. And of course, Lily was right in the middle of the tumult.

"I mean, Lily-chan's been working really hard you know! For my first mission, it worked perfectly!"

Of course, the other girls had their own stories to share. Especially the girls who also worked in the action squad were throwing complaints such as "You ended up getting lost!" or "You had me look for something you lost, right?", coming from the white-haired and silver-haired girl. From the looks of it, the other girls properly managed to support Lily's clumsy parts. That being said, Lily joking around, and the other girls acting fed-up was the

usual pattern of conversation. Ron was used to this, so he just continued chomping on the food. He only furrowed his eyebrows, wondering if this was what a usual gathering of girls was like.

At the same time, a single girl approached him.

"Sensei" It was Elna.

Cutting a part of her main dish lamb steak, picking up a piece with her fork, and pushed it towards Ron.

"Open wide, Sensei~"

The girls raised voices of admiration.

"Ohh, so aggressive!"

"Do it! Show your manliness!"

"She sure is attacking you..."

Ron's head started to hurt. He felt bad for Elna, but he had to ignore the fork in front of him.

"...What is this lack of pressure here?" Ron glared over at the girls. "Do you girls even understand what kind of situation you are in...?"

Though he didn't enjoy it, he deemed it necessary to give them a lecture now. They didn't come here for a picnic after all. They were carrying the lives of millions of citizens on their shoulders, on their mission that could cost them their lives. They were too relaxed in the face of death.

"....."

After this first reprimanding, each and every single one of the girls kept quiet, the room filled in an awkward silence. Seeing this, Ron grew worried that he might have gone too far, ruining their spirits, but that was needless worry.

The white-haired girl was the first to show a reaction, throwing a glare at Ron.

"Lack of pressure? We're all nervous, you know? 'Course we are, we're scared to bits. We've been holding our bodies from shaking furiously ever since we left our country."

"Then, why?"

"Because we have you with us today." The white-haired girl puffed out her lips. "That's why I figured we'd be fine...because I trust your strength."

Agreeing to her words, the other girls nodded along. Still, they were too relaxed after all, Ron wanted to throw in, but swallowed his words. He realized that the reason they showed openings like this was because he himself was around. Through suffering defeat against him an entire month, their evaluation of him had skyrocketed.

Ron drew closer towards the white-haired girl.

"W-What do you want...?" She twisted her body.

"I'll do it for you." Ron stole the fork from Elna, and pushed it towards her.

"Here, open wide."

In barely one second, the girl's face burned as red as tomato.

"Wha, eh, idio—W-What are you doing all of a sudden!"

"Don't be shaken from something of this level." Ron flipped her forehead.

A roar of laughter ran through the room. Since the white-haired girl couldn't eat the meat, Ron instead directed it to Elna now, who happily gulped it down. To that, an applause got thrown at Ron, who was utterly confused. Instead, he was glad the mood wasn't ruined, and the noisiness from before started to return.

"That reminds me, this might have been the first time," Lily spoke up in the midst of it all.

"What is?"

"Eating together with Sensei. Why can't we just do this all the time?"

"....."

She was perfectly right. At the Kagerou Palace, the girls would cook their own food, and Ron would take care of himself. Thinking about it rationally, it was quite inefficient, but he just regarded this as something self-explanatory. Meals are something you eat together with family. However, Ron had lost his. That is why he didn't think it was weird. But now, as he realized this, he sat there in silence, pondering.

After Ron finished his visit on the toilet, he returned back to the room, greeted by quite the unexpected scenery. All the girls laid on the floor, collapsed. At first, Ron suspected they might have been attacked, and gave it a closer observation. But, as he carefully approached them, he realized they were all just sleeping, with no traces of any use of gas or sleeping drugs around, meaning the food wasn't poisoned either. They all just fell asleep because they partied too much.

Explainable, since they were working through day and night. Through the past month, and the last two weeks, they didn't have one day of break. Now that they had gathered with all their trusted comrades, the exhaustion must have finally caught up to them.

*Still, no matter how tired they might have been, don't just fall asleep in a public space like this.*

Ron pondered if he should forcefully wake them up, but he eventually decided not to. They finally could catch up some sleep, no need to rob that from them. Even if someone were to use this chance to attack, Ron himself should suffice to counter that.

*This is also the duty of a superior... Well, I sure am making myself sound important.*

The waitress came in to bring some after-dinner coffee, who was asked by Ron to let them rent the room for the night, showing him he had the money for it. Feeling hesitant to use the resource money for [Tomoshibi], he paid with his own. The waitress gazed at the scenery around him, and gave the okay with a warm smile.

*Really, without even knowing about my worries...*

Gazing at the sleeping faces of the girls, Ron sighed.

[Showing someone else their sleeping face is a proof of trust, you know]  
Certain words came floating up in his head. They were the words of his previous Boss.

[That's why, you have to protect the people who show you their sleeping face at all costs]

When Ron was still young, there were times when he was having a quick nap in the Kagerou Palace, curing the exhaustion he gathered on this travels and training. Once he woke up, his Boss or the other members of [Homura] would always be greeting him with a smile.

[Boss...it's our job to use the openings of enemies like that]

[Guido. What are you saying in front of the kid?]

[He's not a kid, Boss] Guido slapped Ron on the back. [This one's a genius. Once he's all grown up, he'll be an even better spy than all of us]

[As of right now, he's still a kid. A cute kid who takes a nap in the afternoon]

[I'm...not a kid] Ron showed a fake bold face.

Seeing this, the boss and the other members started to burst out laughing. Only Guido hit him on the head with a [Don't go acting all strong now, kiddo]

[Violence is the wrong answer] said the Boss towards that.

[You do realize you are a spy, right?] Guido argued against that.

Ron was used to this talk, and just narrowed his eyes as he felt the warmth. As soon as these memories vanished, he realized something.

*.....? Why is it that, when I look at these girls, I keep thinking back to [Homura]?*

The two groups couldn't be more different. One was a first-rate spy team, and the other was an inexperienced one, formed in a hurry. As far away as a gem and a normal stone.

*But...it feels like their determination has been solidified.*

Ron looked around at the girls. Every single one had a pleasant sleeping expression on them, and a bit of Lily's drool fell down on the table cloth. He had to protect them at all costs. Even if they always put more work on his desk. If they put this much trust into him, then he had to put trust into his own decision as well—

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Thus, Lily woke up. Her cheeks were wet with water, presumably someone else's prank. Must have been done as she was asleep. She had to act out revenge no matter what.

First however, she shook her head to get rid of the resident sleepiness, slowly awakening her consciousness. Through that, she realized what kind of situation they were in. Inside the restaurant, on the table with all the food gone were her sleeping comrades, having her help deduce that they fell asleep during the kickoff party.

"Ah! Not good!" Lily jumped up in a panic.

All she remembered was Ron commenting on their lack of pressure and tension, and his heavily displeased expression. What a horrible situation right after his lecture. Flustered, and scared as well, Lily frantically tried waking up the other girls.

"Everyone, wake up! If you don't, Sensei will pure olive oil in your noses to wake you—"

"Who is going to do what?" Ron spoke up with a fed-up expression, sipping on some coffee in the corner of the room.

Through Lily's efforts, the other girls started to awaken themselves. They also felt an intense fear of being scolded by Ron again. However, contrary to all their expectations, Ron just showed them a soft expression. One they had never seen before.

"Change of plans. At first, we planned on having you invade from the east, while I sneak in from the west, but let's change that up. Each of you, prepare for that."

Ron raised his waist, preparing to leave. He seemed to have been waiting until the girls would wake up. Though they had certain doubts and questions about this, Ron swiftly stopped in his tracks.

"Also..."

He showed an odd amount of hesitation.

".....It's just as you can see."

"What exactly?"

"So you really can't tell..." He narrowed his eyebrows in disappointment. He grew silent for quite a while, as if he carefully chose his words, and eventually spoke up.

"You did well following a boss who can't properly teach or direct you... Thank you."

Leaving only these words behind, Ron left the room on quick feet. Being left behind, the girls stared at each other in confusion, and disbelief. Finally, reality sit in. They've been thanked. By none other than their nonchalant, my-pace man. They didn't know why, maybe just on a whim.

—Still, this might have been the time they turned as one.

The day of the execution finally arrived. The Impassable Mission to retrieve the biological weapon sample, a mission which was previously attempted, unsuccessfully, by [Homura]. Their time of action would be late at night, the darkest night of the month, with a new moon. As the girls respectively snuck out of their lounging facility, they slipped through the darkness, arriving at the meeting place, namely at a cliff where you could look down at the capital.

They weren't wearing their school uniforms of their own country, nor the attirements they had prepared for the sightseeing alibi. Instead, they were clad in black, specialized clothes, focusing on mobility and secrecy. With this, they would be able to go all out.

Past their gaze was the research facility they would attempt to infiltrate, yet again reminded of the impending difficulty of sneaking inside. A five-floor building, with only a small portion of involved people allowed to make it onto the site. Trying to pass through even during the evening, you'd get shushed away. However, there were enough guards stationed even at night.

If you wanted to evade any attention on your infiltration route, you had to ascend a 20 meter tall wall, or broadly attack from the head-on.

Their goal was to steal the biological weapon sample. The worst virus weapon to date, [Hades' Doll]. The members of [Tomoshibi] were currently glaring down at the facility.

"No change in plans. We'll infiltrate from two routes. You all and I will be moving separately."

Ron was still wearing the same suit as always. However, his hair was vastly different from usual. He had his normally shoulder-length hair bound together as it hung down behind, showing how long it actually was. It wasn't a hairstyle that would allow him to mix easily into the crowd, but rather a preference first and foremost.

"There's military personnel and workers stationed permanently in the research facility—Render them useless. Everyone who obstructs."

The girls nodded. Every single one was showing tension. All the intelligence work so far was, naturally, nothing but preparation for the main event. No matter what dangers they had to face before this, what awaited them now made it look like child's play. Every single move could be your last if you weren't careful.

"Then, let's go." Ron raised his right hand. "Let's get out of this alive." He snapped his fingers.

Along with this as a signal, the girls mixed into the darkness.

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At the start of the mission, the girls turned into a circle. They moved their hands into the middle, glaring at each other. Lily let out a shout.

"Battle on who gets to carry the luggage~!"

~~~~~"Yay~!"~~~~~

"Rock, paper, scissors time! One, two, three!"

At once, all the girls put paper—Except the silver-haired girl, who had chosen rock. Following that, the girl jumped at Lily, grabbing her by the collar.

"Lilyyyyyy? Didn't you say we'd all prepare rock~~~?!"

"Ehhh? Did I say anything like that~?"

A harsh war of intelligence trading broke out to give yourself a tiny bit of advantage, even if it was just doing the dishes. Lily acted like she was clueless about the white-haired girl's accusations, and the heaviest luggage was packed on the white-haired girl's back. The luggage consisted of a gigantic backpack, which will surely be in the way for her own mission. However, she had the most strength in the team of girls, so this might have been the most reasonable result. To the heaviness of the backpack, the girl let out a groan, as she started walking.

Around the vicinity of the research facility, large lights were built to threaten any possible intruder. The girls had to evade them in order to get in. Surrounding the facility itself was a 20 meter high wall.

"All seven at once will be a bit much..."



Agreeing to the statement of one girl, two more athletically skilled girls threw up wires on the upper part, and climbed up the wall. Checking that no guards currently had vision on them, the next two followed. Finally, the white-haired girl with the heavy luggage as well as the last two crossed the wall. For this to work out immediately, they had to deactivate the alarm system on the wall a bit prior to the mission.

Now, the seven girls climbed down to the backside of a big storehouse, a place to put preservation tanks. At least ten of those were lined up next to the other, pipes around. Most likely, a place to store gas or oil for the research. The girls hid in the shadows of these, readying their weapons. There were no on hostile grounds. No use in talking themselves out of it if they were found. If they hadn't investigated before this, their mission would have been an immediate failure.

"...The next guard coming on duty now has a key. Time to smoothly steal it." The black-haired girl whispered.

At the same time, the girls all swallowed their breaths. The key they had failed to get previously had to be obtained now during the real deal. Lily hesitated between an automatic handgun, and a knife, but eventually decided on the knife, with poison on the tip. But before the act, she saw another girl's expression grow pale, sweat running down her face.

"Is everything okay?" Lily softly rubbed her back.

"Honestly, I'm totally scared..." The brown-haired girl spoke with a meek voice. "This bad feeling I have won't disappear...like we're having some fundamental misunderstanding about the situation..."

"Stop." The silver-haired girl broke in between. "It's too late for that."

It was a wise decision, but way too late into the game. If Ron said so, then it'll be fine—they presumed that right off the bat, but this was the only thing they could rely on. His words alone acted as the mental support for the girls on their very first mission like this. They couldn't doubt now. But, it was still stuck in their heads. What if there was an enemy even surpassing Ron and his plan. What if there was a roadblock they couldn't cross no matter what? Even [Homura], who he had been a part of, had been annihilated on this mission to retrieve the biological weapon sample. Would they be able to win with how they were now?

Once this fear had been inflicted into the girls' minds, it cursed around inside the girls' bodies like a virus.

"—No need to worry."

Lily was the one who broke through this heavy atmosphere.

"Even if there was some trouble, we just have to revise the plan, just like we've always done."

Through her words, the fear inside the girls had started to soften, if only a little. But before they could talk any further, the sound of nearing footsteps approached their ears.

Just as suspected, it was the guard they were expecting. The black-haired girl gave the signal with her eyes, as three girls jumped out of the shadows.

It was only one guard. One of the girls took out restraining tools, silencing him. As he started to panic, the other two girls held him down, and tied him up. The guard couldn't win in this battle of strength, and was rendered useless. As they had guessed, the key they needed was in his pocket.

"Now, time to question you," the black-haired girl announced in a charming voice. "At a safe space—"

Right as she wanted to pick up the guard's body, it happened.

"Careful!" A scream rang out.

Reflexively, the girls jumped away from him. They only felt like a breeze blew past them. The existence of that wind was way too quick to follow, and the body of the guard was swiftly lifted up. In the blink of an eye, the guard had been rescued from them. No sound, no existence of it. He just floated into the air, and disappeared.

All the girls could do was follow him with their eyes, and find a single large-statured man. He had long limbs, almost like an insect in human form.

Wearing a navy-blue jacket, he had the appearance of someone not necessarily belonging here. His lightly-colored hair made him look rather young, but the beard on his face contradicted that. All in all, his appearance heavily stood out. And to finish it off, he just threw the guard he had just saved rather harshly to the ground.

"—Weird. That idiot disciple should have come West?" It looked like he flashed a disappointed smile. "Maybe he changed it right before? Well, it's just a small calculation error. As long as I take all you brats hostage, it'll all be over anyway."

Lily knew that man. Ron had previously spoken of him.

"You are—" She said, her voice shaking. "—Guido-san?"

Being Ron's teacher, a member of the decimated [Homura]. Naturally, he should not be alive. Especially not exist here on enemy grounds.

"Ahhh~?" Guido scratched the back of his head. "How exactly do you know my name?"

"Sensei spoke of you before..."

"I see, was he getting touchy-feely? Sounds fine to me. I wasn't the only one leaking information after all." Guido's vicious gaze sent shivers down Lily's spine.

Leaking information—Her heartbeat accelerated, and cold sweat started leaking from her entire body.

"How did you know of our infiltration route..."

"You can't tell? I'm a member of [Homura], you know~ Basically, a former resident of the Kagerou Palace." Guido's mouth turned into a devilish grin.

"—I have wiretaps in the entire Kagerou Palace."

With this, the girls understood just how that legendary spy team [Homura] managed to get annihilated. Why this tragedy occurred on the mission when Ron was absent.

**It was all because of Ron's teacher's—Guido's betrayal.**

At the same time, they realized what kind of danger they were in. If the information leaked from Ron was correct, then—

“I know pretty much all about your little plan. Welcome, this will be your hell.”

Guido took something spherical from his waist, and threw it at the girls.

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The sound of that explosion even reached Ron's ears as he dashed through the facility. It came from the west. The direction where the girls were working on their infiltration. From what he could guess, they were found, and started a battle. Dull, long sounds which lasted in your ears.

*The kind of sound similar to the bombs Teacher used...*

Just as bombs in itself had great varieties, so did the sounds generated from them. With tiny differences, Ron could differentiate them. The sounds arriving at his ears now made him remember a certain man. Though he didn't have any definite proof, it still flashed back inside his head.

The corpse on the day [Homura] was annihilated, and the doubts it induced. Ron's teacher's—Guido's. The corpse looked like him. However, the wounds were so severe that you couldn't say for certainty that it was him.

[Homura]'s strongest battle freak. His talent and skills in battle vastly surpassed Ron's, a real monster.

1 Actually not sure if Elna uses first person here or not, but considering the situation, it makes more sense for her not to name herself, even if it was a fake name.

## Chapter 4: Lies and rescue

At the storehouse of the research facility, where the gas tanks were being stored—

The bomb let loose by Guido didn't have much impact. Only because of the gas tanks next to the girls, the explosion ended with such force. But, the blast of the bomb ran through Lily's body. She somehow managed to keep her ground, and slipped in between the pipes, hiding in the shadows of the water tanks. If what Lily guessed was correct, the goal of this bomb was to create a loud sound, alarming people in the vicinity that a battle had begun. Though she didn't know who exactly this was aimed at.

In the gaps of the tanks, the plumbings were almost as thick as the roots of a large tree. Together with multiple of these, it was like a forest, allowing Lily's comrades to hide around there as well. Guido on his end just stood at a place separated from the tanks, not moving an inch.

"What should we do now?" She heard the white-haired girl's voice from somewhere. "Once the enemy comes here, we'll have to deal with guns and handgrenades, you know?"

The silver-haired girl commented in a cheeky tone. "Of course. I don't know how strong the glasses are, but if there's gasoline or other highly inflammable gas in there, there's a high chance that we'll die in the explosion."

"Then, whether it's fighting with our knives, or running away, but—"

"Both options are way too dangerous...It's the teacher of Sensei, right? That frivolous lad over there."

That one action of his showed enough that he was an excellent spy. They couldn't see a future where they would be able to win. Not to mention at close range like this. Not knowing how to respond to that, Lily just held her tongue. She was good at cheering on without having any prominent basis, but coming up with concrete plans was out of her jurisdiction. From across another water tank, they heard a silent voice. It was the red-haired girl.

"If we run away, we all will eventually be caught...Fighting here with everyone has the highest chance for all of us to make it out alive..."

No arguments there. Hence, everyone prepared themselves. If they hazardly run away now, maybe one of them might survive, but none of the girls wished for this. No matter how naive it may be, they didn't want to use anyone's life as waste for another to get away. At the same time, Guido seemed to have guessed the girls' intent.

“Seven versus one, huh.” He showed an uplifted smile. “I’ll hold down every single one of you. You’ll surrender in three minutes max.”

Three minutes. Lily had hoped that they could make it to five minutes at least, but that was wishful thinking. Guido wrapped his arm around his back, bringing out a drawn sword. A weapon very untypical for a spy, but it seemed to be his speciality. The sound of spit being swallowed could be heard from one of the girls. Meanwhile, Guido lowered his waist, getting into a stance. Around twenty meters separated Guido and the girls lurking in the gaps of the tanks. With his physical abilities, it would take a mere moment to reach them.

A few seconds of silence.

A whistle counted as the starting signal. The girls all showed themselves at once, firing their handguns.

“Don’t let him get any closer!” The black-haired girl screamed. “If he gets too close to the plumping, we can’t shoot anymore!”

Seven guns were pointed at one man, fired with no restraint whatsoever. No hesitation. If they were as foolish as to hold back, being killed would be a deserved fate. If they fought a normal person, he’d be riddled with bullets, and suffer an immediate death. Oh how fortunate that would be.

Guido however dashed towards them in a zig-zag, occasionally blocking a bullet with his blade, or redirecting its course. He showed no signs of fear or anxiety, as the corners of his mouth were formed up like a smile.

In the blink of an eye, Guido arrived at the place filled with the plumbing, forcing the girls to give up on using guns. From here on out, using firearms would be self-destructive. As for the seven of the girls, they all leaped up at the same time, with wires wrapped around the plumbing, and they hid in the dark again. Luckily, this was a forest of tanks and plumbing, so they weren’t lacking in hiding spots.

Guido didn’t bother with the other girls, straight chasing after Lily. It felt like she was a rabbit, being chased by a lion. She ran along the plumbing with all her strength, but Guido was slowly catching up to her with even higher speed.

—He’ll catch me.

Right as she thought that, a whistle arrived at her ears. It was the signal for their trap. Two seconds after this signal, Lily jumped up.

“Sorry about this!” Lily screamed. “But we’re used to fighting someone higher ranked than us!”

Be it the development of a plan, the quick-witted combination of several ideas, and adapting to the quick changes, those were all talents they’ve honed. Doing half a rotation forwards, Lily looked behind her. Guido had chased after her, with the sword in hand, and came to a sudden halt. His right leg was wrapped in countless numbers of wires. Someone must have set it up—this booby trap.

After landing on the ground again, Lily looked up at the sky, and found a silver-haired girl holding up her middle finger. At the same time, the other

girls turned towards the incapacitated Guido, approaching him with knives. On top of that, the pink-haired girl approached him with a stun gun from behind. They were in perfect cooperation. With his right leg not free, there should be no way he could avoid knives approaching from every single direction.

“...Are you really that stupid?” Guido showed a cold smile.

Lily watched this scenery, dumbfounded. Right then, it happened. With barely any effort, Guido tore away the wires holding back his right leg, sinking a kick deep into the stomach of one of the girls. Kicking her away, he swiftly dodged the knife attack.

“Just in what country did you learn that trap, huh?”

Greatly swinging his right leg, the girl’s body was thrown at the gas tank. As a result, the pink-haired girl could only let out a faint groan, as she collapsed onto the ground.

“The techniques of the Republic won’t work on me.” A cold voice resounded. Laying on the ground at Guido’s feet, the girl showed no signs of getting up.

“Six people left.”

Watching this happen, the girls yet again became painfully aware. The pure and innocent mood maker of the group, the ashen pink-haired girl—Annette was out cold.

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Countless famous spies and workers were assigned at the Endy Research Facility of the Galgado Empire. Taking the biological weapon into consideration, you’d probably want to station more personnel, but having made enemies with many countries in this world, the Empire didn’t have the manpower for this.

In the first place, protecting a facility such as this wasn’t the job of an intelligence agency. That job was made for the army. On top of that, for the spies of the Empire, the Republic of Deen was already dead meet in their eyes. The only dangerous group [Homura] had been annihilated. On top of that, they had a list of their supporters. All they had to be wary about were the survivors of [Homura]. Awaiting him at this research facility with a great number of soldiers at their disposal, they had the perfect trap. After their success, they had free reign on the country itself.

Thinking that, one of the Galgado Empire’s spies, Eve, let out a yawn in the administrative building of the research facility.

“Hey, you think the guys from the Republic of Deen are already dead?”

Eve was a female spy in her mid-twenties. Shown, brown hair made her look like a young girl. In the intelligence agency of the Empire, she mostly acted in counterintelligence—namely, aiming to spot enemy spies. At the communication room, her and other soldiers were currently on stand-by. Some of them were rather displeased with Eve’s lax attitude, but she herself just smiled as she ignored that. Army and soldiers in every country were just tied down. They must have been agitated by the girl, who was relaxing as she licked some candy in her mouth.

Still, all they could do was hold back in silence. There is no clear power difference between army and intelligence agency by any means. The intelligence agency of the Empire was a completely independent organization from the army. That being said, on top of holding any sort of information on any kind of scandal related to the army, and being way more useful in this day and age of spies and intrigue, the intelligence agency became a more proficient, more powerful institution over the army.

"The state of things, [Aobae<sup>1</sup>] has come in contact with spies near the storehouse to the west."

A single young male soldier answered.

"Another squad has found traces of an enemy spy near the east gate, and are currently on the search."

"Hmmm. Then the information we received beforehand was correct."

Eve fixed her posture on the chair, putting her legs on the desk. The soldiers around her narrowed their eyes to that.

"Um...Is a question okay?" The young man called out to her.

"Hm?"

"What kind of chance of success do these rats of the Republic of Deen have?"

"Probably zero?" Eve said, quite disinterested.

"With all due respect, I highly doubt that..."

Eve snorted to that, as if she ridiculed him.

"Guido...No, right now it's [Aobae], I guess. The second he betrayed the Republic of Deen, and joined the Empire, he's been leaking all the information about their spies. About their methods, their strengths, weaknesses, and of course, about the current plan as well."

"That is why they will be taken out immediately...?"

"You see, he put up wiretaps in the previous residence he lived in. The enemy didn't pick up on that, and just kept living there. That's why we have all the information we need on the infiltrating spies. We let them roam free without them knowing, arriving here with false information even." Eve snapped with her fingers. "We're just killing insects who flew into our web." Even at the places where they could hope to escape, they already had soldiers and traps prepared. All that was waiting for them was total annihilation. That being said, the young man was still not quite satisfied with this, and continued.

"However, I heard there is one person even [Aobae] has to be careful off?"

"Are you talking about the enemy's boss? Ahh, no problem with that. That guy is actually [Aobae]'s pupil."

"Pupil...?"

"They fought hundreds of training battles. That being said, [Aobae] never lost once, so as long as we leave it to him, the enemy's boss should pose no threat."

That was what [Aobae] himself had stated. The enemy had been raised by him ever since he was a young boy. He knew whatever trick he had up his sleeve.

"On top of that, the plan of this entire operation is to kill that man. They were all just playing along in the palm of my hand. All that's going to happen is a one-sided slaughter."

The young man listened to this story, and let out a deep sigh.

"Just makes you feel pity."

"Yeah, explaining it like that, they sure are unlucky." Eve came up with an idea. "Maybe I should go out to greet them, clean them up myself."

The soldiers around her started a commotion.

"No, you will have to stand-by here, or else..."

"Huh? What's with that face? You trying to play cool against me?"

"But..."

"Huuuuh?" Eve glared at the soldiers.

They must have been unable to stand back, being underestimated by a woman. At the same time, the young man took a step forward, determination filling his movement.

"If I may be as honest, this research facility is under the security of us soldiers. If it comes down to fighting the spies infiltrating here, we would be more than enough—"

He couldn't finish his words. Around his thick neck was a thread, wrapped tightly. Being restrained like this, he let out a similar blotted voice like a frog. This thread was connected to Eve's fingers. Putting more strength into the strangulation, she looked down at the suffering man.

"What was that you just said?" She kicked the man's face. "Now listen here. I don't know if you're some high horse in the army or whatever, but this isn't the period for you anymore. The period of apes where you can slaughter left right and center is over. In this day and age where technology is advancing, a battle is filled with too many risks and costs, so we can't waste that. You get me?"

That is why spies act in the shadows. Not using missiles or any other sort of weapon, they are able to reign in the enemy country. As if to teach that to the young man, Eve continued to kick at him.

"What meaning is there in this trained, honed body of yours? You think the enemy will just attack you head-on? Assassination. Wilful murder. Poisoning. If you don't have any countermeasures for that in your head, you won't survive in this new world, you know?"

The second the consciousness of the young man was about to fade, Eve stopped.

"Now, I guess it's time to slaughter some spies."

The young man gasped for her, and still tried to stop Eve.

"P-Please wait. There is still one first-class spy with the enemy—"



"Doesn't matter. Not in the slightest. Using surprise attacks, I will not lose. I've killed many people with this thread of mine, all of them enemy spies." Eve showed her thread. "Guess I'll go deliver the head to [Aobae]."

As soon as she laughed with that thought in mind, a report came in, saying that there was an intruder in the building with the research lab. Perfect timing, she could go and assassinate him herself.

Though she showed a rather carefree attitude, she didn't have her guard down by any means. She had a gun in her hand, and as soon as she would hear a sound, she was ready. Killing the sound of her own footsteps, she checked for the presence of the enemy. The research facility had turned into an inhuman, robotic atmosphere. The cutting edge linoleum floor was hygienic, making it harder for footsteps to be heard.

Hence, Eve threw her thread to widen the range of control. Naturally, this very thread didn't make any sound. It was even difficult to make out with the mere eye. All she had to do was wait until he fell into her spider's web. At her fingertips, she could feel a slight vibration.

*Got you now...From this weight, it's a grown man, huh.*

Pulling in the thread, she tied him up. As expected, he really was no big threat. Flashing an evil grin, Eve approached the trapped prey—

"Bueh," a weird sound escaped from her mouth.

The man had been hiding behind her back. Just having an annoyed look on his face, he wiped off the blood of the knife. Eve didn't even know what happened to her. Feeling a scorching heat, she touched her throat. A large amount of blood was gushing out. Her throat had been stabbed.

"What, just a small fry." The man muttered, disinterested.

She couldn't believe this scenery. Eve should have definitely caught someone with her thread. He must have cut the thread in one second, and attacked her.

"Seems like the Empire is also lacking hands. Sending someone like this as a guard."

The man caught Eve's body before she could collapse, and rummaged through her clothes. Seeing that there was nothing of value, he coldly threw her to the ground.

"I don't even have the time to play with someone of your level. I'm a bit busy."

The man didn't even bother finishing Eve off. He just walked away, lackluster of interest, and Eve's vision finally went blank.

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"Six people left."

Guido's cold voice resounded through the research facility at night.

"Annette-chan..."

Inside Lily, the hypothesis turned into confirmation. It wasn't a lie. Guido's fighting skill and techniques were on Ron level. In the first case, even more than that. Not to mention that, the way he handled the traps and his own

body during the fight, somewhat looked similar to Ron himself. He was without a doubt Ron's teacher.

Lily became quiet and observing. She could feel her heart clenching with anxiety and fear. They were fighting an enemy who was most likely stronger than the person they couldn't beat for an entire month. On top of that, they were already missing one crucial person. Lily raced her eyes over the collapsed pink-haired girl in the corner of her view. Having received one of Guido's fierce attacks, her chest was still faintly moving up and down. She was breathing.

"She's still alive—"

"Killing is second-rate."

Chains fell down at Guido's feet. They were those used in restrictions and to tie people up. Putting these around the pink-haired girl's limbs, he called out to the others.

"Come out. You have ten seconds. If not, I'll cut off one of her fingers for every second you take longer."

Lily grit her teeth so intensely it hurt. Taking hostages in the world of spies was by no means underhanded—No, it was a general concept. A quite simple style to have people move according to your will. Taking hostages without a second thought actually accounted for being an essential skill. Time passed, and a cold sweat ran down Lily's cheek. In the shadows, she exchanged gazes with her comrades.

"Sensei isn't here..." She dropped her gaze. "We have to save her by ourselves. Nothing else for us to do."

She prepared herself, and stepped out of the plumbing's shadow, standing face to face with Guido.

"Quite the fast decision." Guido almost sounded like he was admiring Lily.

"They often praise me for that."

Though they barely do for any other things—She thought, but kept that to herself. As Lily stood there, she heard the faint murmuring of the black-haired behind her back.

—Let us come up with a new operation while Lily is buying time.

Lily relaxed her shoulders, and got into an act. Apparently, it was her job now to focus Guido's consciousness on her. Fight on.

"But, sadly a miss."

The other party wasn't in any rush for a quick victory.

"You should have thrown away your comrade, and run away. Those who get captured should commit suicide as well. You won't get far in this world if you try to keep your friends, you know?"

"Sadly, we were taught that [A hostage resembles a hurt swan]."

"...Man, I really thought I raised him better than this." Guido massaged the back of his neck.

Lily herself made fists with her hands, staring at the enemy.

"We all decided that we would make it out of this alive."

Leaving their ally and running away—that wasn't even a playable choice.

"Sensei, and the other seven beauties of us are [Tomoshibi]. Seven colors in the rainbow, seven sins. Seven is the perfect number. Tia-chan as the Sin of Lust, Zibia-chan as the Sin of Wrath, me as the Sin of Greed...And that's how we split it up."

At the same time, a *Who's the Sin of Wrath here?* return was thrown in from the white-haired girl. Even now at a time like this, she was acting commanding. This in itself put more strength into Lily, as her expression relaxed a small bit.

"It would feel bad with eight or six people. Together with the seven of us, and Sensei, we'll all make it home."

"That's what you call being naive."

Guido seemed to be fed up with the idle talk as far as things looked. He switched the hand in which he was holding the sword, and pointed the tip of the blade at the hostage. The tied-up pink-haired girl let out a groan.

"Come at me."

—If you're just going to draw it out, I'll kill her.

He didn't speak it out loud, but that's what the action told Lily.

"If you are on Sensei Ron' level, then—"

The other girls winked at Lily.

"—Right here, right now, we'll overcome Sensei."

They've been doing the same thing the entire past month. Against overwhelming strength, the weak worked together to stand up against it. It was time they showed what they had achieved. It never succeeded once, but they knew the methods.

—Deceive and defeat.

Lie as much as you can, turn 0 into 1, 1 into 5, create an opening. Next to Lily, the red-haired girl appeared, whispering the plan into her ears. Lily gave a wink to show consent. Someone threw a bomb at Guido, which acted as the starting signal of battle.

A smokescreen.

White smoke roze up into the dark night, and finally disappeared. Guido didn't move an inch to that, and just remained as calm as before. He would not move away from the hostage. Around the time the smoke disappeared completely, the movement of the girls was completed.

Two girls jumped out, the white-haired and silver-haired girl. Each of them respectively with gloves and dagger. With Guido between them, they attacked. In terms of raw fighting power, they were the top two of the group. Though he blocked off their attacks with his sword, showing barely any effort, the girls immediately continued with their assault. As for the white-haired girl, she had obviously put down the gigantic backpack before this attack, and with her light and nimble body, she blogged the sword by using the gloves, inserted with steel. The silver-haired girl on her part used these openings created by blocking the blade, and attacked with the dagger. Guido however didn't even break out in a sweat, only looked like he was truly enjoying this battle. All of this as he was on the defense.

“...!”

As the white-haired girl let out an inaudible groan, another girl came to assist. Once again, the item thrown by the black-haired girl was a smoke bomb. The surroundings were wrapped in a smokescreen again, as the white-haired and silver-haired girl retreated.

“What a pain.” A sigh leaked from Guido’s lips.

He changed his target, dashing away from the target, onwards to the black-haired girl. In a panic, she tried to escape, but she couldn’t win against Guido’s overwhelming speed. On top of the plumbing, she tumbled.

“Ah—”

Letting out a groan of shock, she fell onto the ground. The second she collapsed, Guido was already waiting for her with the sword ready.

“You can’t run away anymore.”

“...Stop.”

The black-haired girl let out a feeble voice. Tears built up in the corners of her eyes, and she did a pathetic attempt to crawl backwards whilst on her butt. She twisted her body, showing her slender bodyline. As she was trying to run away, her clothes must have gotten stuck somewhere, as her dress was slightly ripped, revealing her thighs.

“Don’t...don’t come here...” A weak voice escaped from the normally courageous and confident girl.

“.....” Guido’s reaction was exceptionally gold. “You have the eyes of a wixen trying to entice a customer. You plan on grasping a man’s sadistic feelings with this?”

With that, the girl immediately stopped her fake tears.

“It’s too late.”

Several piano strings appeared around Guido, attacking him. Almost like a spider web appearing around its prey. Naturally, if it was him, he should be able to cut them away and escape easily, but—

“—Marvelous.”

They had prepared a counterattack. From the dark night, a man appeared overhead. With a knife ready, he charged into the only opening of the web of piano string. This man should be an existence Guido couldn’t ignore.

“This is checkmate, Guido—”

“You think I wouldn’t be able to see through a disguise?”

Guido didn’t hesitate for one second to cut down the piano strings even at the sudden appearance of the fake Ron. Calmly countering the attack which was way too slow for the real Ron, Guido grabbed the fake.

“Ugh...”

The girl disguised as Ron let out a groan.

“Quite the proficient disguise, but that would definitely call me ‘Teacher’, y’know?”

Guido put strength in the arm holding onto the fake Ron’ one, swinging the girl around, throwing her away. As she flew, the girl’s head hit the ground, peeling away the mask on her face. After rolling around for a few meters,

she tried pulling herself up once, but lost her strength and collapsed sideways. Thus, the calm operation advisor of [Tomoshibi]—Grete was forcefully removed from the battle.

“Five people left.”

Guido quickly restrained the red-haired girl. This very action occurred in a mere few seconds. Enough for the black-haired girl to run away. Guido moved back, and hit the girl’s chin with the back of his sword. It didn’t feel like he used too much strength, but the girl nonetheless lost consciousness, and collapsed. The next girl to drop out from the battle was the beautiful black-haired beauty, holding up the team with her grown-up attitude—Tia.

“Four people left.”

And with that, the white-haired and silver-haired girl finally caught up with the battle again. Guido swiftly evaded their attacks, dashing up a gas tank, and ran his gaze along the battlefield, almost as if he was looking for his next prey. He happened to meet eyes with Lily, who was still hiding, watching the situation unfold.

“These two have been attacking me the entire time, but—” He pointed the tip of his blade at her. “What are you doing, after throwing caustic words like that?”

“.....”

Lily dashed, and shook her head. As of right now, planning, command, battle, everything had been left to someone else.

“.....Support?”

“Great personality you got there.”

It couldn’t be helped, since people had things they excelled at, and things they didn’t. Or so Lily wanted to emphasize, but she sadly didn’t have the time for that. Guido had already decided on Lily as his next target. He came soaring down with speed reminiscent of thunder, approaching Lily. She couldn’t even start an evading motion. His dropkick, with a beautiful form, showing no unnecessary motion, shot at Lily’s shoulder.

“Determination!”

Together with that shout, Lily grabbed his leg. Of course, support was not the only thing she excelled at. She had a weapon like no other. From the girl’s entire body, toxic gas started leaking!

“Gas...?”

For a second, Guido’s eyes turned round.

“Now!” Lily screamed, as she led onto Guido’s leg.

Though she was thrown off right after, she had fulfilled her mission. Guido’s body staggered. At the same time, the third special paired attack of the girls followed. The white-haired girl spit an annoyed *Just fall over and die already* as she leaped at Guido, whilst the silver-haired girl flashed a rather softened version of her usual arrogant grin, stabbing at him with a dagger.

The battle only lasted for a moment, ending in the exact opposite of how Lily anticipated.

“Three people left.”

First, the white-haired girl was hit in the jaw with the back of the blade, and she collapsed.

“Two people left.”

Following that, falling prey to the roundhouse kick of Guido, the silver-haired girl was blown into the plumbing. With this, the always commanding, confident white-haired girl, Zibia, and the whilst arrogant, still showing excellent work silver-haired girl, Monika, both were unable to keep fighting. —Stop joking with me.

Lily kept running. She was in rage, being forced to watch two of her allies get knocked out like this. On top of that, she couldn't afford to waste that chance. Her poison should have worked without doubt. Guido however was as calm as ever, and even gazed at Lily in admiration.

“Is this an idiosyncrasy? Being able to move in this paralysis gas.”

“You should not be able to move though!”

Preparing herself, she grabbed a knife and pushed it towards Guido's body. However, he stopped her without any great effort. There were no signs of his movement becoming slower, more dull.

“No way...” Lily was baffled. “To my poison doesn't work...”

This poison was even strong enough to shortly seal Ron's movement. How can he be this calm?

“Ah, it did work. I closed my mouth immediately, but it's pretty tough actually. Look, my fingertips are getting numb.”

As if to show her, he waved his hand, and then closed it as a fist.

“And—did you think that was enough to defeat me?”

“Lily-senpai, run!”

Then, they heard a voice behind them. A girl with tears in her eyes jumped out of the shadows, clinging to Guido's back.

“While I buy time, you have to—”

“Shut up.”

Cutting the girl's words immediately, she fell prey to the sword. She couldn't even hope to win against this insane speed he used. Tragically, this marked the end of participation for the meek, feeble and always careful brown-haired girl—Sara.

“One person left.”

Run away, or fight? This one moment of hesitation would prove fatal. Before she could move her legs, Guido was already right at her, his fist running deep into her stomach.

“And that's the end of it.” The man shortly announced.

For this entire month, the girls worked their hardest. Their efforts didn't betray them. They indeed became stronger, and have leveled-up drastically. Their talents had been honed thanks to Ron.

—But, it was just one month. Guido had been working as a spy for over twenty years. He didn't spend the entire time in training, but acquired actual battle experience. And this result shows here. In simple terms, they had no hope from the very beginning.

“Zero.”

An arrogant declaration arrived at Lily’s ears, and resounded until she collapsed.

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Ron was running. He could only think about the explosion sounds he heard just now. Feeling impatient, he dashed through the research facility as quickly as his legs carried him.

—I have to hurry. Faster. I cannot lose my comrades a second time.

Ron broke the window glass with a kick, and jumped outside the facility. From the third floor. Sending a wire flying, he made it connect to the rooftop of an adjoined building, breaking the window of that building, and hushed inside. Though it was a rather crude action, he didn’t have time to choose. It was an important short cut. He didn’t know how long they cut last against a first-class spy in battle. No, it would have been good luck if it was just a first-class spy.

*If they are really fighting that man, then...*

In order to save them, he had to move as quickly as possible. Imagining the worst-case scenario, his legs carried him even faster. However, as if to prevent that, a large door sealed off the hallway, a metallic one. Ron took out his lockpicking tools, and kept closing in on the door. To his shock, there was no keyhole to be found on the door. At the same time, a voice arrived his ears from behind.

“That door doesn’t open. Unrelated to your lockpicking skill. It’s just a wall.”

Turning around, a middle-aged man stood there. Guessing from his outfit, he was a proficient spy. Next to him stood four normal soldiers. Another new bother Ron didn’t have the time for. In a rush, he tried kicking open the door, but it didn’t move an inch. From the shock he felt on his foot, it seemed to be just an ordinary wall. To that, the middle-aged man commented.

“You want to take the shortest route to the storage of the gas tanks, right? To save your subordinates.”

“Hm, so you know my personality?”

“Heard about it. Also, all your moves and actions are right in our control.”

The man laughed, as if he was joking. “The map your subordinates stole is a fake. This here is actually a dead end.”

“.....”

“To only now realize you walked right into our trap. What a foolish man you are.” The man shrugged with his shoulders as he sighed, only to burst out in laughter again. “Unsightly.” A jarring voice. “You were also acting as an instructor, right? Your poor students were quite laughable, really. Not aware that the Empire knew of their every move, gathering information we willingly gave, and getting all excited on top of that. They must have enjoyed playing spies, huh.”

“.....”

"Weren't they drop-outs of their educational institutions anyway? You thought you stood any chance against us with the dull blades of failures?"

"....."

"You finally aware of your lack of skilled guidance for them?"

In front of the door were no windows whatsoever, making this a complete dead-end. The soldiers standing next to the man all readied their short machine guns. In this linear hallway with no places to escape to, it was the most effective weapon. The middle-aged man put up his hand, about to give the order.

"Now, go and rot in he—"

"I don't even have the time to play along, huh."

He expected some sort of information to be leaked, but all he spat was worthless verbal abuse. Not an enemy to take serious. At the feet of the middle-aged man and the five soldiers—a large fire emitted. In this closed-off space, the flames spread in the blink of an eye, not leaving the men any chance of escaping. Only Ron, who separated from this wildfire, as well as using a fire proof suit, could save himself from the inferno. Though the fire had disappeared after a short moment, the soldiers were all unconscious. Only by using his allies as a shield, the middle-aged man was able to be spared from that. As he screamed in anguish over the flames sticking to him, he glared at Ron.

"A-A bomb...?"

"I walked into this trap on purpose."

Fixing his suit, Ron sighed. He was plenty fed-up with the man. At the same time, said middle-aged man had his eyes open wide, not understanding what just happened.

"Weird...you're not Eve, so how can you sense traps like that?"

"It was just a feeling—is probably enough of an answer. Well, it wasn't that bad of a scheme."

"The likes of such a weak country's worthless spy..." The man took a few steps back.

However, because of the bad condition he was in, he immediately broke down again. Because of the blast, his legs seemed to be severely wounded.

"Even if you make it past here, what awaits you is just death." The man spit.

"Your inexperienced subordinates can just get slaughtered by [Aobae] for all I care!"

Having too much vigor was always a good thing. To think he would scream this much after losing this one-sidedly. Ron didn't have time to admire this whatsoever.

"All bark."

Taking out a single weapon, he closed the distance between him and the middle-aged man.

"Eeeek..."

"I'm not good at this kind of work. Don't get irritated."



Hearing that, all the color drained from the man's face. What Ron took out was a thick, jet-black, and chipped—torturing knife.

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After having slain Lily, Guido let out an exasperated sigh.

*Quite disappointing...Didn't last all too long, either.*

It was weird. The girls truly believed they could win against Guido. Just how low were their actual chances, having tasted defeat against their teacher for an entire month, and now the teacher of their own teacher appeared.

Turning around towards the collapsed girls, he threw handcuffs at them. As soon as they hit the girls, they moved like actual living beings, wrapping around their limbs, and restrained them. Not like they were in any condition to move, but still.

Right as he turned over to Lily, about to throw the handcuffs at her, when a transmission came through.

□[Aobae], how's it looking over there?□

One of his allies called him. He was rather displeased to hear this unfamiliar codename, as he twirled the handcuffs around his finger.

"Most of it is done. The intruders are unable to fight back right now, and I was on my way to restrain them."

□That's what I expected□

"Did you find Ron?"

□Five minutes ago. Allies spotted him in the B building, but he seems to have escaped. There is a high chance that he threatened one of our people and received a big chunk of information□

His eyes opened wide. He had received regular reports on Ron's movement inside the facility, but he didn't expect him to move this quickly. So quickly that the guards and soldiers couldn't keep up.

*It'll only take him seven...no, five minutes, huh.*

He had confidence he would be able to win even if he was assaulted, but he couldn't let down his guard. He knew the man's skill and talent after all.

"...Have to hurry and make it so these fries can't move anymore~"

To finish the job, Guido threw the handcuffs at the girl.

"Haaa!"

Those shackles were repelled. As he moved his gaze, a single girl was glaring at him. A gray-haired girl—her comrades called her Lily.

"Correction...one person left, huh."

Restarting the countdown, Guido called out to her.

"Don't go resisting now. Every time you move an inch, you'd feel horrible pain."

He should have hit her right in the liver. Hitting the exact point there, the bloodstream gathers, robbing strength of your entire body. Moving your body in this state of lethargy should move quite the burden on your body.

"...You're not going to kill us?"

"Huh? I won't kill you." Guido softly shook his hand. "Don't worry. I don't plan on killing you right now, so just go back to sleep."

“—Then, even more reason not to sleep now.”

Lily started to push herself up on shaking legs. Her upper body was shaking furiously, and she almost collapsed a few times, but she definitely pushed herself past her limit.

“Why are you getting up? You can’t win against me.”

“I finally understand your aim...” Lily showed her white teeth. “It’s Sensei, right? Your aim, from the very beginning.”

“Yup, correct.” He even clapped.

It wasn’t out of ridicule, he seemed really impressed.

“It’s exactly as you say. For the Empire, he is just as important of a matter as the biological weapon.”

Of course, ‘Hades’ Doll’ was still protected to the brim. For the politicians of the Empire, it could prove to be one of the strongest weapons in negotiations and political activities in general. Even if the chance of a new war is relatively low, they had to be prepared, or they would fall behind. However, for the intelligence agency, there is an even more dangerous existence.

“Let me tell you. On the day [Homura] got annihilated, it was planned that he would die on a different mission.”

The reason Ron was sent on a different mission from [Homura] wasn’t connected to Guido’s grace. For this man alone, you had to set a very special trap, unless you can’t kill him, but you couldn’t save the members of [Homura] either. That resulted in the final decision to split them.

“Even so, he made it back alive. He beat the Empire’s spies at their own game. Hence, for them, that guy is the most problematic target right now.”

In a situation where everyone would have been killed in action, he made it out alive. Guido didn’t think of him as a human. Ron often referred to Guido as a [monster], but in his eyes, Ron was even more distanced from a normal human. For the Empire, an existence too dangerous to be left alive.

“But, this is the end. As his master, I can guarantee that. No matter what, this time for sure, he will die.”

For that, their preparations were perfected. Guido turned the muzzle of a handgun towards the sky, and fired, having the sound of the gunshot fill the night sky. This sound must have reached Ron’s ears as well.

“That guy will pick up the gunshot and explosion sounds, and come here. In this situation with you seven as hostages, coming to challenge me. With an enemy he definitely won’t be able to defeat, he will fight for his life—and will eventually lose it here.”

Lily laughed at that explanation.

“Haha, I wonder if he really will come here...? We might as well just be sacrifices for hi—”

“He will come. It’s that idiot disciple after all.”

That was the only thing the teacher could say with certainty.

“He definitely won’t throw away his allies. He’ll cross every trap, and will come here even if it costs him a leg—That is the man I knew as my pupil.”

Even in this world of deceiving, he would not throw away his own justice. He'd rather come here and risk his life rather than savely retreat.

"Right~ Ahaha, I can tell. He definitely seems like the type to come," Lily sighed, as she gazed up at the night sky. "—And then, he'll die, as he protects us."

"He thinks too much of his allies. Using this weakness, that man is actually quite easy to conquer."

"Wah, this is pretty cruel~ If Sensei comes, he dies, and if he doesn't die, we will be killed. Pure despair, am I right!" Ehehe, the girl laughed. "Then, even more reason to stand up and fight." She said.

Lily's knees were wobbly as she stood, barely able to keep herself from falling.

"If Sensei will die once he comes here, then we just, you know, have to defeat you before it comes to that."

"You must realize that it's impossible, right?" Guido nonchalantly threw a knife at Lily.

She somehow managed to block that, but she lost her balance in the process, once again falling to the ground. She still didn't have any strength in her legs.

"You got no chance to win against me. Why are you trying this much?" He snorted arrogantly.

He didn't even bother praising her for this sort of suicide attack. All he did was scorn her.

"Because it feels comfortable." Lily muttered.

"...What are you on about?"

"It's the reason we work this hard." The girl started putting more strength into her voice. "I'm sure you wouldn't get it. This enjoyment in trying to overthrow Sensei every single day. How we were seriously getting into a fight during the nights of our reflection. This burning passion in wanting to become an even better if it's with these comrades—No way in hell would someone like you, who betrayed his own friends, ever understand that." Lily spit at him. "What a poor excuse of a human you are."

"....."

Most likely an attempt to provoke him. Reflected in the girl's eyes was an emotion filled with contempt, and also pity. Of course, this level of provocation didn't do much to anger Guido. There was no need to lend ears to a all bark no bite spy on her last breath.

"The poor ones are you bastards." Guido laughed heartily. "Comfortable? Yeah, I can see that. A gathering of failures like you, sharing similar wounds, being able to live in luxury like that, you must have been happy. You must want to protect that, alright. But, as a result of you just playing around, everyone was taken hostage, just turning into shackles to hold down Ron for his eventual death. You still don't get that?" Guido was honestly a bit amazed.

The reason for their defeat was a lukewarm level of friendship.

"It's over." Guido grabbed the sword.

Using the back of the blade, he rammed it directly into Lily's stomach, at speed she had no hopes of blocking in time. Her back hit a plumbing behind her, as she coughed up blood.

"Just watch. The result of your failures working your 'hardest'. The last moments of the man who will be killed because of your sins."

".....!" Lily couldn't even force out a voice at first. "Sensei...you can't... you'll be killed...don't...come here..."

"That's exactly why he will come. That man, for certain."

Unable to cast away his comrades, unable to run away in this battle he will end up losing. Prioritizing your allies over the mission, a detrimental flaw for a spy.

And thus, the five minutes since the transmission should have passed.

Leaving the useless enemy alone, Guido wondered where that man could appear from.

"Don't go sneaking around like that, and come out already...you stupid pupil of mine..."

Letting this girl fight all on her own.

"You must be close by, right? Hurry up...your enemy is right here!"

One could almost feel resentment in Guido's voice. To think that the man he gave his life and blood to raise—turned out to become such a moron.

"The man who killed your family is right here!"

With intense vocal volume, Guido's voice filled the silence.

"The teacher you're supposed to overcome is right here!"

He screamed even louder.

"Your students were risking their lives, you know?!"

His voice even had the tanks vibrate. But, there was no other sound following. No voice, nor any footsteps approaching. Weird. The five minutes should have passed already.

"——Why doesn't he show up?"

"Guido-san, a question..." Lily leaked a meek voice.

Guido reacted, and looked down at her. And then, a shiver ran down his spine. The teary-eyed, terrified expression on her face disappeared, and like a death god, saying that your life was over, her dry eyes gazed at him.

It made no sense. Once Ron came, he would die. If he didn't, then the girl would die. The girls should be in a despairing situation, so why—

"——How long do we have to keep playing along?"

Why was the girl—laughing?

At the same time, he heard the crackling sound of a new transmission coming in.

□—Marvelous□

No way would he have mistaken that voice. The transmission came from the first transmission room, basically right next to the research lab. **Ron didn't make his way to save the girls, but brought the mission to a success.**

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The night of the kickoff party, before the begin of the mission— After they disbanded, Ron called Lily to his room. For some reason, her cheeks were a bit reddened as she arrived, but clearing up any potential misunderstanding she had was too much of a bother, so he just ignored that, and got right to the point.

“I want to task you with the most dangerous job of the mission.” He said. Lily was perplexed, and eventually got on a high horse like she usually would, but at the very end, she agreed with a confident *If it’s for my comrades*. Though he felt that this pure love towards her comrades was a bit too dangerous, Ron knew this was one of the best traits. He put his faith in her, and announced with a quiet voice.

“Most likely, the Empire is letting us move freely.”

“Eh?”

“I did tell you before, but the Kagerou Palace is being wiretapped. The enemy most likely knows about our every move. The information you’ve gathered was probably just dummies to have you play along. You can burn it right away.”

“Eh, then what about all the effort we put into gathering it?”

“For naught.”

“So direct!”

Lily sighed. It must have been quite the shock.

“Though it sounds a bit cruel, but with one month of effort, you can’t hope to win against first-rate spies. Especially with my mediocre teaching.”

He did admit that they’ve grown exponentially. However, having been drop-outs of their previous education institutions, they were still no enemy for someone of Ron level. It really couldn’t be helped this time around. Hearing this, Lily was devastated.

“But, then...”

“That is perfectly fine. We will act like we’re unaware, and infiltrate.”

“And how are we going to take back the biological weapon then?”

“The enemy will be underestimating us, thinking we’re completely clueless. It’s probably meant as a trap for me. If we manage to anticipate that beforehand, we can make it out. I will fight the enemy directly, and steal the right information from them.”

“Sensei, that sounds crazy dangerous...”

She was absolutely right, but it couldn’t be helped in this instance. Luckily, during this one month, he had continued to walk into countless traps built by the girls. That should prove enough as preparation.

“I want you girls...to deceive a certain enemy.”

“Like a diversion?”

“Exactly—act weak, and create an opening. That is your true mission this time.”

Ultimately, the reason he gathered these girls, and the reason he trained them ran down to one simple one. He would not be able to defeat **that man** by himself.

“Hmm...there’s still something I’m not quite getting.”

Being told the details of the operation, Lily put one finger on her cheek, softly tilting her head in uncertainty.

“Basically, we’re supposed to be playing along the Empire who’s making fun of us in the shadows, and then reveal the lie we kept for a month, and show our true efforts as a team, strike them down with a secret attack, and have them eat dirt?” The corner’s of the girl’s mouth raised up. “That—sounds super awesome to me.”

Because of her strong mentality, Ron could put trust in her. Thus, he announced, calmly, yet confidently.

“Deceive, and defeat. Show them the results of our efforts.”

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□Can you hear me, Teacher...? Been a while, right□

He could hear the voice of his pupil. Looking at the lamp of the transmission device, he knew where this voice came from.

*The first transmission room...?*

The room next to the research lab with the biological weapon, at the southern tip of the research facility. Guido was far away from that location. Ron had taken over the location.

□I just secured the biological weapon. Felt like telling you about that□

Just as he remained in his memories, Ron announced with an indifferent tone of voice. The second he received a transmission from this first transmission room, he knew what was going on. What left Guido speechless however was the fact that Ron headed for the research lab instead of saving these girls.

“To think that you would prioritize the mission over the lives of your allies. I’m shocked.” He gave words of admiration.

Guido had fully expected him to rush here. Unexpected—but nothing too pressing.

“Come here within five minutes. If not, I’ll go around killing the girls one after another.”

In the end, he still wouldn’t let the girls die. Eventually, he would still come here, and die at the hands of Guido.

□No—□

Ron spoke up, as calm as ever.

□I’m not coming□

“Huh?” Guido doubted his ears.

A dumbfounded voice leaked out of his mouth.

□I brought the mission to success, so I’ll be going home now. After all that running around, I stand no chance against you in a battle. I’ll be prioritizing my own life□

It felt like the world was turned upside down. At the same time, Ron explained.

□My students being in danger, or the enemy being someone who betrayed me, or my teacher who was supposed to have died, all of that, well, I can

admire your hard work for setting all of that up, but I do have to tell you.  
The two of us won't be fighting today□

“...What are you talking about?”

□You failed to protect the biological weapon, as well as finishing me off.  
Nothing more, nothing less□

If the other person was a normal spy, it would have been the adequate decision. Throw away your comrades, and make sure that you at least make it home with the mission a success. But, the other person was someone who would never dare do that. Ron would never discard his allies. This entire plan was built upon this one conviction.

“Don't make me repeat myself. Come to the west of the facility within five minutes. Else, the girls are dead.”

□Don't make me repeat myself. I will not come□

“You are throwing away the girls—your comrades?”

□Exactly□

“The Empire will definitely torture them to get every ounce of information.”

□I recommend gut punches□

Impossible. How could he remain this calm? In this situation, with the girls' safety greatly endangered, how can he show such a nonchalant reaction?

Riddled with questions, a cold sweat started building up on Guido's back.

His subordinates were recording every conversation happening in the Kagerou Palace. On the fourth day they started living together, Ron definitely swore 'I will not let you die' towards the girls. Was that just a lie? He actually sent them to their deaths?

—No, that man would not choose this. Guido himself, who knew Ron better than anyone, could say that with absolute certainty.

□But, Teacher, you have one fatal misunderstanding□

“Hm?”

In midst of this confusion, Ron words entered Guido's brain like water into dry ground.

□I anticipated that [Homura] would eventually be betrayed. I was surprised to find out it was you, but it didn't change anything in the end□

“That doesn't explain anything. How did you know?”

□Just a feeling□

“...I forgot that weird incompetence of yours.”

□If you want to know a reason, it's because I found the wiretaps you set up. Also, for [Homura] of all teams to be annihilated, that was only possible if someone from the team itself leaked information□

He had found the wiretaps? That would mean—

□All our actions happened under the assumption that the traitor was listening in□

“All your actions...”

□For example, there is this certain rule we had. 'Always only use your special ability outside of the Kagerou Palace', you see□

Guido gasped as he remembered. According to the subordinate who was listening in on the happenings in the Kagerou Palace, the girls had been perplexed at some of the rules when they first arrived.

[Rule 27: Be always serious when going out]

□You didn't know one of the girls was a poison user, right?□

".....!"

□You acted like you knew everything about them, but you were completely unaware. Not even you would know of the 'Educational institution hidden geniuses'.

Ron raised his voice. Almost as if he wanted to show his supremacy.

□Hence, I don't even need to go there. Let me announce right here. You will lose against the girls□

"Huh?"

□Not even you can win. These girls hold talent far surpassing mine□

Everything Ron said only induced more confusion in Guido. Ron was sacrificing the girls. The girls would be able to win against Guido himself. Ridiculous. All of it, just sounded like an empty dream. Still, the girl called Lily was still smiling.

"...Haha, seems like that's enough time I bought."

"Time you bought...?"

"This time, I'll be seriously seriously serious. It's time for the child prodigy Lily-chan to shine."

Almost as if to say she was holding back this entire time.

"...'Hidden geniuses' my ass. The reason I don't know about you is because you're all failures, right? I know everyone else who has excellent grades."

"T-That's not true...?"

They were totally drop-outs. Ron's words must have been a lie. As if there was a monster to surpass Guido in the midst of these seven.

*...But, I don't get it. These girls have no chance of winning. So why is that idiot disciple not coming to save them?*

Is he planning for a bargaining? No, looking at this, there's no mistaking it.

"Second transmission room..." He connected to a different source. "Is it true that the transmission of Ron came in front the first transmission room?"

□Yes, that's correct. Ron has taken care of the personnel in the room, and taken the transmission for himself. He arrived in front of the room, but he shows no signs of moving□ A spy in the other transmission room explained.

□Ron definitely is...in the place furthest away from you□

"What is going on..."

There would be no rescue. And their tricks wouldn't work either. Meaning, there are two possibilities.

One, Lily actually was a hidden genius of the Republic of Deen. Or two, Ron was truly ignoring the girls' safety. The first one has to be wrong. Guido would have known as they fought. There were some parts where he could voice admiration, but it was all still too rough. Then, the latter? But, after



keeping his comrades so precious, a man like Ron would turn his back to them now?

"Did that idiot disciple actually change...? Without saving his allies, just—" "—We don't need any help."

Guido's words had been cut by none other than a coldly smiling Lily.

"How long until you will finally stop seeing me as the poor princess of a heroine that needs to be saved? I'm the cheeky, strong, cool, and beautiful Leader princess, you know?" Thus, the girl stood on her two legs.

"Here at [Tomoshibi], I found the method with which even a failure and dropout like me could bloom in full glory. That's why, as the leader, I'll use the entire team's strength to strike you down!"

There was no hesitation in her words. In this situation where she should have been backed into a corner, strong will resided in her eyes.

"Don't get on a high horse now, you shitty failure..."

"I'd advise you don't look down on me, or you could end up hurting the most?" Lily opened both her arms.

"Codename [Hanazono]—It is time to bloom and go wild."

With a questionable decision for a spy, Lily proudly announced her codename. The change followed immediately. Almost as if flowers were blooming from her body, one after another, objects were born.

"Bubbles...?" Guido groaned.

A great mass of bubbles appeared from every opening of Lily's body. Her hems, her collar, from the openings of her buttons, from beneath her skirt. Looking like soap bubbles, they fell to the ground around Lily. Those bubbles didn't just disperse however. As if they were coiled about the plumbing and tanks, they stuck around them.

Even just watching them, you'd want to avoid these at all costs, as they held a poisonous violet color. A jarring, burbling sound ran out, as the bubbles grew. Immediately after, one side of the girl was wrapped up with bubbles.

"Well, with just the poison gas, it was enough to leave Sensei defenseless for a while."

"Huh?"

"A new technique I learned after an entire month of training. Using my idiosyncrasy, they're poison bubbles."

Idiosyncrasy—something she experienced herself before. She can move inside this paralytic gas. Even poison you'd have to avoid at all costs does not affect her. She was resistant to poison. Knowing this, Lily stuck out her tongue.

"How strong do you think these poison bubbles are?" Lily asked, with a humming tone.

So they were really poisoned bubbles. Watching them grow in number, and bigger as well, Guido fell back a bit.

*There must be bluffs mixed in there...*

Guido calmly judged. There was no need to expressly reveal her idiosyncrasy.

*But, what if the poison was strong enough on level to kill you with one strike?*

He wasn't scared. He basically just went through a normal thought pattern as a spy always should. At the same time, Lily readied herself with these mysterious bubbles, flashing a provocative smile. No fear to be seen. Accepting the gap of skill between them, not able to count on Ron' help, she still showed her teeth. Might she actually be a genius, and not a failure? In this helpless situation, was she actually an existence that could show this much leisure?

His thoughts raced for a second, and he found determination.

"Idiot disciple, are you still listening?"

□What is it?□

"You probably can't see it, but only Lily is the one to move."

□That's more than enough fighting power□

Ron' voice was filled with confidence.

*I don't get it...*

Then, for the first time, Guido felt panic.

*It hurts to admit it, but just as he said, I don't know how strong that girl really is...*

With any other spy, he had the leisure to calmly think this through. If it was any other spy of the Republic of Deen, or just any excellent candidate of any educational institution, he had their respective traits in their head. As a male, Guido even heard of the male problem children of the students out there. He could imagine their fighting tactics plenty. And now, his only blind-spot—a female irregular of an educational institution.

"No, that doesn't matter...No matter what plan it is, I just have to break it up head-on."

Even if this was a battlefield with a lack of information, he fought through many of those to stand where he does now. Drawing out every ounce of strength in his body, Guido awaited Lily's attack. He would take her hostage, and force Ron over. That was all. Equally, Lily seemed to be prepared for her attack as well, and clad in the bubble—

Lily started dashing. With all her might. Rather than her speed, the position she was in made Guido more sensitive to her. She was clad in bubble armor, closing in on him. Her long hair was ruffled into a mess, as she let out a war cry, attacking him head-on.

"Eh?" A disarrayed voice.

"Too late."

The conclusion Guido induced happened with a lightning fast attack, not even allowing Lily any counter. Lily hadn't even realized he had closed the distance. She didn't see anything. Guido had shifted his step, making the other person misjudge the distance. She didn't even have time to resist. Whilst evading the bubble Lily was clad in, he slashed at Lily's back.

"!"

Even she must have reached her limit with that. She felt her entire body draining of strength. Finally, the silver-haired girl with a mentally strong enough to stand against an enemy of Guido's level—Lily was out.

"Zero."

With this, he defeated everyone. He was convinced he definitely destroyed their plans now. Wiping off the blade, he pushed it back into the sheath. Whilst doing so, he realized that a bit of foam rested on the back of his hand. He didn't manage to dodge it all, apparently. He reflexively wiped that away, but he felt no change. Not pain or numbness either. It just felt like normal foam.

"...Was the poison a lie? Or does it have a belated effect?"

Either way, it didn't seem to have been deadly poison. Judging that, Guido gazed at his surroundings, checking on the seven collapsed girls. He realized they all had a different hair color. Ashen-pink, red, black, white, bluish-silver, brown, and silver-grey. Lily brought a rainbow as an example, and now it made sense. These were indeed seven colors.

"Ron, I've now dealt with the girls complete—"

He couldn't finish his words.

—Suddenly, a shadow appeared overhead, closing in on Guido.

".....!"

Plumbing fell down. It must have separated itself during the intense battle. At once, he jumped back.

—Induced by Lily's bubbles?

The timing was too good to be a coincidence, but he quickly denied that possibility.

—I guess not. This was just incidental. A row of coincidences must have built up.

**At the very least, he had no proof to say otherwise. Guido didn't have any information on a girl who could predict accidents.**

*And, this isn't much trouble anyway—*

He himself found no problem evading it. He had already separated from the location where it would hit the ground.

But then, something moved. At the piles of heaps Lily created, at the edge of his view, something shook. His reaction was too late. As he was in the middle of his jump, he couldn't evade. Something jumped at Guido's back. Following that, a sharp pain ran through his body.

"Huh—?"

He spit out blood. His back felt scorching hot. Lily was still out cold. The other six girls should not have been able to move either. What just happened? He suppressed the pain, and looked behind him. A drawn sword appeared from the bubble **Guido had believed to be poisonous.**

"What misfortune..."

A blonde-haired girl stood there. Holding the knife in her hand, she had stabbed it accurately into Guido's back. Holding beauty like a doll, her eyes were filled with melancholy as she gazed at him.



“For her first role in a cooperation, that was quite tough...”

This scenery shouldn't exist. Guido once again looked at his surroundings. At the storage area of the research facility, seven girls lied scattered on the ground. He wasn't seeing things. The only other possibility—

“An eight girl...?”

The giant backpack the white-haired girl had carried—she must have hid in there. And after that, she hid her body with the help of Lily's bubbles. However, even if his brain understood the ways behind it, Guido still couldn't accept it.

Didn't Ron always refer to ‘The seven of you’? And didn't the girls always say ‘The seven of us?’ Lily even made that analogy with ‘The rainbow also has seven colors’, so why? They should have been seven. As if he heard this doubt, Ron spoke up via another transmission.

□Oh right, I didn't tell you□ It was a freezing cold voice. □The eight girls are to live together as just seven, was also one of the rules□

“Huh...?”

□Since you probably guessed it already, let me do you a favor and introduce our members. First is the noisy silver-haired girl, always acting as the troublemaker—**Lily**. Next, a girl with a commanding, quite rude tone, and white-hair, acting as the leader of the special attack unit—**Zibia**. The third girl is quite feeble, and a worry-wart with brown hair—**Sara**<sup>2</sup>. Following that is the fourth girl with charming black-hair, specialized in seduction and the operations leader of the team—**Tia**. Fifth member is the calm, graceful-mouthed red-haired girl who insists on calling me ‘Boss’—**Grete**. The sixth girl in the team has bluish-silver hair, always arrogant, always referring to herself like a boy<sup>3</sup>, and the temperament of a prodigy—**Monika**. Next girl has a pure atmosphere to her with her ashen-pink hair color, often using ‘The great me’ to refer to herself, pushing up the mentality of the group with her naivete—**Annette**. Finally, the eighth and final member, possessing golden-blond hair, an indifferent attitude, isolated at first because people thought she attracted accidents—**Elna**. I did always refer to them as ‘Seven girls’, but they were actually eight□

It was a trick they set up beforehand. If there was a way to directly check, it would have been an easy feat to reveal there were actually eight girls, but separating the voices of eight girls on a recording would prove difficult.

“Just how many...lies did you pile up...”

The encounter with the girls was a lie, the words he had sworn towards them were a lie, the deceiving on each other between the girls was a lie, their lives consisted of lies, Lily's strength was just a lie, the poison bubbles were a lie—it was just to hide this one attack.

It finally clicked in Guido's head. The girls never once seriously thought they could beat him. They spent the entire month planning this attack. But, it clicked too late. Blood was already spilling from Guido's back.

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Seeing the collapsed Guido, Lily formed a fist with her hands. Simple-mindedly, her heart bounced, as she got excited over this.

*Operation success...!*

The eight girls are to live together as seven—that was the great trap set up by Ron.

[Kagerou Palace: Rules for Shared-living: Rule 26 -You are to work together as seven and live here]

At first, when the girls had spotted that sentence, they were unable to understand what it was talking about. As Lily arrived, and Ron showed himself, there were really only seven of them. That's why the rule was a bit off-setting. But, on the night of the second day, it all made sense. Elna appeared late, because she got wrapped up in a heavy traffic accident. Thus, the eight of them had to live there as just seven.

—Once all girls were gathered in the same room, only seven of them could speak. On top of that, they couldn't name each other.

Together as a team, they created one gigantic lie. All to use the wiretaps against the one who was using them.

*Well, it must have been really dangerous...*

Lily softly smiled, and moved on to the next part of the operation. Elna searched for a key as she put her hand in his chest pocket. Accepting it from her, Lily freed the other girls who were restrained by the handcuffs. Luckily, none of them were too heavily wounded. At the same time as she was relieved, she was forced to admit Guido's skill in battle. Inducing this much pain in the enemy's body without even leaving behind a wound was quite the impressive, and an important skill in the world of spies. Especially during threatening.

"Now, let's run away! We'll leave the rest to Sensei!"

Lily swiftly went freeing the other girls, as Elna gave an exasperated expression.

"Where did the spirit from before go...?"

"In the end, we're still destined to be saved princess heroines!"

"What kind of weird unit is that!"

In the chance of their encounter with [Homura]'s traitor, the job of the girls would be over. Ron would take care of the retrieving of the biological weapon. Basically, taking away the sweet-mouthing, Lily wanted to get away from this scary place already. By the time Lily arrived at the white-haired girl to free her, she thought of paying her back for some trouble she got thanks to her, and pondered over putting some scribbling on her cheek, but—

"Behind you!" Elna's scream rang out.

She barely managed to avoid the sword slashing at her. The ribbon on Lily's hair didn't make it unfortunately. Elna's sense of danger and perception really was unparalleled. It showed just how much misfortune she had to suffer through in her life. Still, Lily would have rather not seen the reality in front of her eyes now.

Guido was standing again. He had the glaring bloodshot eyes of a predator as he breathed heavily.

"Elna should have definitely stabbed him..."

"I slightly shifted my body after being stabbed, stopping the blade with bone and muscles..." He wiped off the blood dripping from his mouth. "A blacked out a bit, not gonna lie. It's been a while since something like this happened."

Next to Lily, Elna was biting her lips. But, nobody could blame her for this. They still dealt with a first-rate spy.

"What a voracious monster..."

Guido brushed his hair upwards. His hand was still drenched with blood, coloring his hair in a rusty tone. The wind blowing by swiftly dried that blood, and his new demonic hairstyle brought down a heavy sense of intimidation on the girls.

"Let's run away!"

Together with Lily's words, the girls started running. Guido was heavily wounded. He shouldn't be able to chase after them. That is what they deduced. He was just acting energetic.

—But, that assumption turned out to be false.

"—!"

Guido showed a flawless condition, equal to before. The second he jumped, it looked as if he was soaring through the sky as he stomped on the plumbing, and swiftly closed in on the girls in the nick of time. As he arrived above the girls, something shot out of his right hand.

Blood.

He greatly waved his right hand, firing drops of blood at them like a shotgun. With blood being extremely sticky, once you had it in your eyes, you wouldn't get it off that easily. Hence this action could prove greatly effective. His target turned out to be Lily again. She heard the sound of something cutting through the air, a dropkick was aimed straight at her face. Thankfully, the white-haired girl came in right before it hit to block her. But, she couldn't stop the momentum, as she bumped into Lily, blown off into the girls behind her, mowed down to the ground. Because of one single kick, four girls were rolling on the earth.

—Way too strong.

Guido right now was like a wounded animal. Not intent on holding back anymore.

"0.1 seconds." Guido raised up one finger. "That's how much you slowed down my movement, and the result of all your hard work."

Numbers akin to a small calculation error. After putting plan over plan over plan, this is what they got. Guido gazed down at the girls who have gotten up, and pointed the muzzle of the gun at them. Apparently, he didn't bother too much about there being gas tanks at the girls' backs. He was sure he would be able to hit them. Right as Guido steeled his expression, and put one finger on the trigger.

“—Marvelous.”

A cold, yet confident voice could be heard. The gun was flicked away, and Guido separated himself from the girls. At his place now—Ron landed.

“Sensei!” Lily screamed in relief.

Ron turned over at the girl, and threw a briefcase at her.

“It’s the biological weapon. Take it and run away.”

“So you really got it all alone...”

“It’s all thanks to you taking care of Teacher.” Ron turned his back to the girls, and glared at Guido. “I’ll take some time, so go on ahead. Take route 4 and leave the country. Don’t forget to do preparations like a fountain erupting in the plateau.”

“That’s quite the mysterious instruction, but I understand.” Lily answered, as she checked the well-being of the other girls.

On the backside of that, the reunion between Ron and Guido happened.

“Been a while, Teacher...”

“Ron...”

Teacher and disciple had been reunited after having been separated by death, but how should they talk? It should have been difficult, but they had more pressing problems than this. At the same time, the girls started running towards safety.

“My subordinates have shown excellent work.” The girls heard Ron voice at their backs. “Your movements are now 0.1 seconds slower.” His voice was filled with calmness. “I finally caught up to you.”

In the face of that, Guido seemed to have been inflicted with rage.

“Ron!” He let out a roar.

Whilst running away, Lily turned around to watch that scene. Guido readied his handgun, attacking Ron. His speed greatly surpassed Lily’s reaction speed.

“Teacher, it’s a shame, but—” Ron’ lips softly moved. “You right now aren’t even worthy of being my enemy.”

The last Lily saw was Guido soaring through the sky, and not out of his own desire. She couldn’t even guess what Ron had done. Their fight had been too quick for Lily to follow. But, the only thing she knew was that the winner of it all was her teacher Ron.

Five minutes later, the girls arrived at the wall of the research facility, and managed to escape whilst being under heavy fire. Hopping into the beforehand prepared truck after they disappeared from the sight of the Empire, they immediately took their belongings and crossed the border. Thus, the Impassable Mission ended—in success.

1 Bluebottle fly

2 He also mentions her rather peculiar way of talking, but that’s quite tough to put into an English equivalent

3 Again, she refers to herself as Boku



# Epilogue

One week after the events of the Impassable Mission—

The girls of [Tomoshibi] were gathered in the reception hall. Each and every one of them holding a giant travelling bag. Some of them looked nervous, some sleepy as they yawned. Because they were partying until late night, they weren't able to get a good wink of sleep. There were even those who hadn't finished packing yet.

Lily was first on that list, as she frantically stuffed some western clothes into her bag, but realized she had forgotten something in the process, and pulled out the contents again. From the looks of it, she had clearly put in too much. Taking out a handgun she had put in there in her usual confusion, her expression turned into one of joy.

"Ahh, looking at spy tools like this sure makes me remember. The moment we deceived Guido-san...Ahh, it was the birth of the genius clown Lily-chan."

"The preparations were already complete back then," the white-haired girl pointed out in a commanding tone. "I'm impressed you could come up with something like that. Something about the balance of seven sins or whatever."

"Shut up, Sin of Wrath."

"Before I beat the hell out of you, what sin are you responsible for?"

"Greed, Envy, Gluttony, Sloth, and Pride."

"There's not even a balance to begin with!"

Everyone had retorted on this during Lily's conversation with Guido.

Although the operation was to deceive Guido, Lily's words were too crazy to ignore. That being said, it all worked out in the end, so nobody could blame her for being this arrogant about it. However, there was one person who knew some cold words to that.

"Elna and the others...didn't even do that much..."

"Hmpf, what are you talking about!"

Elna sat down on her travelling bag, almost reaching up to her size, and flapped her legs up and down.

"Elna and the others snuck into one corner of the research facility, landed one hit on the enemy, and eventually ran away..."

"Yeah, great work if I do say so myself."

"In the meantime, Sensei took care of at least twenty guards by himself, disguised himself as a soldier, stole the important keys, opening up three

vaults, soliciting the researcher, stole the biological weapon, destroyed all the documents, fought against four enemy spies, and even defeated the enemy we others barely inflicted any damage on.”

“.....”

Lily calmly listened to all the achievements of Ron, took a deep breath, and stepped forward towards Elna.

“Take this, cheek-pulling!”

“Fueh?”

—Lily snapped.

“This is punishment for this cheeky Elna-chan!”

“Sh-Shutop!”

“Ohh, this sensation of your skin, so you actually existed, Elna-chan!”

“S-Shut ubu!”

“I mean, I didn’t feel your presence at all during the battle...Did you disappear and go somewhere else?”

“You’re so cruel!”

Lily used both her hands to pull on Elna’s cheeks, checking if the girl was actually in front of them. As Elna looked like she was suffering, the other girls leaped at Lily with a *Don’t tease Elna like that!* — Lily however continued with her actions, as the other girls pulled on Lily herself, until Elna raised her voice.

“I-If you approach Elna this carelessly...”

“Woah, the floor—!” Lily’s feet slipped.

The bending of the carpet robbed her footing, as she wrapped all her comrades up in her tumbling. As result, Elna accidentally opened the zipper of her bag, spilling the contents everywhere, to which she muttered her usual ‘What misfortune...’ catchphrase. Pinning the other girls beneath her, Lily had her back on the ground, looking up. Swiftly ignoring any hissing on hurrying her to get up faster, she just continued.

“Haaaa...” A sigh resembling a voice escaped her lips. “So these enjoyable days will be over soon, huh~”

The reason they were packing things—was because they would say goodbye to each other.

“Exactly.”

They heard a calm voice. In one corner of the reception hall, Ron had himself seated on a sofa.

“[Tomoshibi] is a team established only for a short period of time to challenge the Impassable Mission. Once the mission is completed, you would disband. You can be proud of yourselves.”

The girls just softly nodded along. The girls were pulled in as a team as an anti-measure for the traitor of [Homura]. Now that their duties were completed, they were to disperse. There was no more reason to force the still inexperienced girls on missions like this any further. Thus, the girls were setting out to return to their respective educational institutions. The

next time they would be working as spies, it would only happen after a real graduation, and not a provisional one such as right now.

"It's time." Ron announced, seeing that the locomotive would leave soon. They already finished their goodbyes yesterday. Hence, the girls swiftly headed to the entrance, holding their travel bags. Each of the girls swiftly gave her thanks to Ron, and stepped outside of the door. Ron himself was watching them off, not saying a word.

"....."

"Hm, is something wrong?"

The final girl of them, Lily, spotted something in Ron's expression. For a second, his lips had moved as if he wanted to say something.

"No, it's nothing." He softly shook his head. "Let's meet again, somewhere."

"Yes...Though it will take a few years for that to happen..." Lily showed a meek smile. "—One day, again."

\*\*\*

After seeing the girls off, Ron went to finish the final job of [Tomoshibi]. His destination was the Republic of Deen's Cabinet Office. It took him around two hours by car from the Kagerou Palace. Located in the middle of the capital, it was a rather plain-looking building. Making sure that he wasn't tailed, he entered the so-called Office of Foreign Intelligence.

In this western-styled room, a silver-haired man waited already. He had the slim body stature of a withered branch, but his eyes were sharp, akin to a bird of prey, observing its surroundings. He didn't have any name. Everyone just called him C. He is the boss of every spy of the Republic of Deen. All the instructions for the spy teams inside the country came from him.

Ron went on to orally report. After C finished listening to it, he gave him words of praise with *Well done*, and he continued.

"With this, the army has a debt towards us. Now we from the Office of Foreign Intelligence can move easier."

"I didn't do this for the sake of some insider war."

"Now, don't say that. Regulating the increasing imprudence of the army will eventually lead to more peace for the citizens."

The office head—Ron called C like that—showed a smile, if only with his mouth.

"Let me put up some coffee for you."

"No need."

"Don't be like that. I really like caring for my subordinates who successfully came back from a mission."

Ignoring Ron's own opinion, the office head put mineral water into an electric pot, starting to boil some water. Ron took offense in that, as he glared at the office head, but he didn't pay much heed to that, and started grinding the coffee beans.

Ron sighed, and gave up resisting, sitting down on the nearby sofa. From the beginning to the end of making the coffee, the office head kept quiet.

After he finished the tea, and brought two cups to the table Ron was sitting at, he sat down across from him.

"First, let me check something." The office head slowly opened his mouth.

"You really disbanded [Tomoshibi], right?"

"The girls as they are now should be able to properly graduate from the educational institution. Accept classes from someone who is properly made to be an instructor, unlike me, and properly raise them." Ron consented, as he took a sip of the steaming coffee.

It just tasted like fad water, but he didn't show anything of that on his face.

"What a shame." The office head rubbed the back of his head. "I really wanted you to continue as a team though. Is there no way you can rethink this?"

"Not happening."

"With this mission, I am certain. Our own information is being leaked to the Empire. With the problem children of [Tomoshibi], of which they had no information on, we could use this as an ace in the hole."

—You can only think so because you don't know the state of things, Ron retorted inside his chest.

He did accept their talents, but he can't deny the worries coming with it. Especially, during times they relaxed, they made grave mistakes.

"I will not force these inexperienced girls to bet their lives on the line for any more missions."

"But, the state of the country is..."

"I will not push the responsibility of the mistakes from the higher-ups onto them."

Nothing more than irresponsibility. This time around, the higher-ups didn't catch wind of Guido's betrayal, and forced the girls onto a follow-up for the mission. From an outsider's perspective, it was quite the pathetic story.

Send people on missions after they gained strength at the educational institution. That should be the norm of things. In the eyes of this attitude of Ron, the office head narrowed his eyes. A faint feeling of pins and needles appeared on Ron's body. Anger...or rather, bloodlust.

"...Feel free to use the power of the state. I'll just go against that."

"I didn't even say anything yet."

"We're both spies. I can see what you're thinking pretty well."

"...For example, using an excellent spy inside the country, and threatening you?" The office head leaned his body forwards, and pointed a sharp gaze at Ron.

It was the usual intimidation the man used, being able to control every spy inside the country.

"—Just try it."

But, Ron didn't bite. Even if his brethren inside the country turned into enemies, his decision would not change. Hence, Ron equally straightened his back, and returned the glare. The first one to break eye contact was the office head.

“...Having lost [Homura], I cannot afford to lose your loyalty now.”  
He flashed a smile, drinking some of the coffee he had brewed, making it as delicious as ever.

“Can’t help it. It was the best decision to protect the girls, right?”

“I’m thankful to them, you know.” Ron equally took another sip of the coffee. “Don’t worry. Nothing will change just because [Tomoshibi] was disbanded. Just leave all the anti-Empire missions to me.”

Hearing these words, the office head shrugged with his shoulders, looking slightly anxious.

“The reason I wanted [Tomoshibi] to continue wasn’t just for anti-Empire measures.”

“What do you mean?”

The office head gazed at the cup in his hand with a nostalgic eye.

“The boss of [Homura] often said this: You are too dependent on [Homura].”

“She was just showing his love for his family.”

“It showed his anxiety. If there would be a time when I lost [Homura], I would be left alone.”

Ron recalled the appearance of his former boss. The person who accepted him after being picked up by Guido was a kindhearted woman, called [Kouro<sup>1</sup>]. Rather than spy techniques, he often learned about morality from her.

“...It almost felt like idle complaints of a mother towards a child she raised.”

“Maybe that’s what it actually was?”

“.....”

Ron kept silent. A wordless affirmation. Though he didn’t know how the woman really felt towards him, Ron at the very least thought of her as a woman. At times strict, at times kind. He could still remember the times he felt at ease just having her by his side.

But—she was gone now. And not just her. His other comrades, brothers and sisters—

“I think it’d be good if you took a small break.” The office head spoke to Ron with a soft voice.

“.....I can’t stop now.”

“No, I will have to accept this order.”

The office head gulped down the rest of the coffee, got up from his seat, and put one hand on Ron’s shoulder. His hand felt heavier than how it should with the man’s body stature.

“I’ll give you one month of break. I can see that you’re tired.”

“Of course. I lost my family after all.”

“No,” the office head denied. “Taking in all of it, it’s even worse right now.”

“.....”

Not responding with anything, Ron just stepped out of the office. Once he came out of the Cabinet Office, the time of day had already turned to night. The sun had sunken, and the moon was hidden by thick clouds. The spinning mill of the suburbs had been sending great amounts of smoke into

the air, making the night even darker recently. Leaving aside the girls, even the small boys of the town didn't leave at night anymore. The location was starting to get compared unconsciously to the big city of the empire. Still, Ron was aware of the difference in power, and sighed.

He was alone. Looking up at the cloudy sky, he walked.

"....."

Occupying his head was the farewell with Guido.

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After the retrieval of the biological weapon, and the safe escape of the girls, one job remained. He had to hear it, right now. Why Guido had to betray [Homura], and kill all of its members except Ron. According to Ron's memory, he shouldn't have had any dissatisfaction with [Homura]. Just as Ron himself, he loved the team, and treated them like a family. So—why? Having fallen flat down on the ground, with a great amount of blood spilling from his back, Guido was unable to keep fighting. Ron walked next to him, kneeling down. But, before he could say anything, Guido forced out a weakened voice.

"Well done, my idiot disciple..."

"Teacher..."

He felt his own regretting voice absurd. After all, Ron himself had inflicted Guido with these heavy wounds.

"I was really surprised." Guido meekly smiled. "To think that the disciples of my disciple would beat me in."

"It was the result of my perfect lessons."

"Don't put on a show now."

Ron wanted to deny that, but gave up. Guido had been listening in on the talk in the Kagerou Palace. He should have seen right through Ron putting on airs.

"I know best that you really suck at putting things into words. Still, you worked pretty hard, huh?"

"The ones working hard were the girls...However, now that they defeated you, it'll be our farewell soon."

"So you'll disband huh. You gonna be lonely?"

"Not, not really." Ron announced. "You just have to come with me, Teacher."

"Huh?" Guido couldn't believe his ears, as his mouth opened wide.

Ron put his hand on Guido's neck, checking his pulse.

"If we immediately treat you with these wounds, you can be saved, Teacher."

"Are you being serious?"

"Of course. The two of us can build [Homura] again."

Ron took off his suit, taking out needles and thread hidden on the back.

Following that, he took a knife to cut the suit and create bandages.

"You're way too naive..."

Guido couldn't believe the scenery in front of him.

"You idiot...Ron, how will you explain this to your superiors...?"

"I succeeded in retrieving the biological weapon. They can't complain."

"Still..."

"You are the only family I have left."

It didn't matter if he would be scorned for this. Who to blame didn't matter, what counted was the future. Of course, there was a condition to fulfill even for that—

"That's why, tell me. Why did you betray us? It depends on that."

Ron scorched the needle with a lighter, and glared at Guido. Stab Guido's throat with that, or seal off the wound, it all depended on the answer.

"[Hebi<sup>2</sup>]" leaked out of Guido's mouth. "A new spy team of the Empire. Quite the ominous troop. The second I saw them, I wanted to vomit all over them..."

"...A team I haven't heard off..."

"And I—"

"Teacher, keep quiet for a second."

Ron cut through Guido's words. Now that he knew Guido had some reason for it, saving his life was the next step, so he turned around to gather the utensils.

"I'll proceed with some simple measures to stabilize you. I understand that you had a reason, so I'll hear you out once we get ba—"

—Back to the Kagerou Palace, he wanted to say, but he couldn't.

As he turned up to face Guido again, he saw a bullet. There was no bloodlust, no sound. Since Ron wasn't all too proficient in any seaming skill, he had to concentrate himself. And that took away his attention. He couldn't react towards the bullet, aimed right between his eyebrows. A perfect surprise attack, having aimed at this opening.

—Death.

The second he became aware of this, blood splattered everywhere. His body was drenched with the red liquid.

"Teacher...?"

Guido's body fell on Ron. At the same as he realized that Guido had protected him, he took notice that the blood on his body was actually not his own. The bullet had pierced Guido's chest. Right as he felt that Guido's body grew devoid of any strength, slowly collapsing, Ron's field of view opened up. On the roof of a far-away building, he spotted a human with a rifle. Eventually, the person turned around, and disappeared into the darkness.

Ron immediately gave up on chasing them, focusing on closing Guido's wounds. He wanted to stop the life in front of him from vanishing.

"——" Guido muttered.

Leaving these words behind, the man's mouth would never open again.

\*\*\*

By the time Ron returned to the Kagerou Palace, nobody was there to greet him anymore. Only the sound of the door being opened and closed

resounded in the building. All he thought about was this mysterious spy team called [Hebi]. He didn't have any intentions of taking a one-month break. He had to enact revenge towards them. He had to find out everything about them.

That being said, right as he went up the stairs to his own room, his feet stopped. Just as the office head pointed out, he must have been tired. He needed to rest, even if Ron himself didn't want to.

He headed to the reception hall, seating himself on a sofa. Beneath the pendulum clock, it was the seat where you could observe the entirety of the room. It's been a while since he had sat in this seat. Back when the members of [Homura] were still present in the Kagerou Palace, it was Ron's regular seat. He loved dozing off in it. After making it home safely from a dangerous mission, he would find relaxation by sitting down here. Lifting up his head, the Boss would always put in some black tea, another would bake some financiers, and Guido made it his mission to buy some cheese cake. The comrades would share laughter and smiles, and celebrate another successful mission.

After he had lost [Homura], and [Tomoshibi] was founded, this place was just another room to pass to leave the house. Maybe he should have spent more time with them. When he would make his way down to the reception hall to drink some black tea late at night, Ron would always find the girls in a heated debate. In order to defeat him, they needed to raise their own strength, even if just a bit. During these times, they would fight, get angry, and develop other plans. Though he was a bit doubtful how much they could do, seeing they didn't even realize him passing through the reception hall to get the tea sometimes, he was always looking forward to their next plans. Leaving aside the days with [Homura], the every-day with [Tomoshibi] wasn't that bad either. But, now he was alone again. Once again, he had lost these days.

"It feels...empty..."

He sat alone in the hall, unable to keep up a smile. What was this emotion, making him feel like his chest was pierced?

His plan was perfect. He didn't put any shame on the title of being the 'World's Strongest Spy', awarded by Guido. The mission was a success, and without a single member dying, he took care of the traitor who annihilated [Homura]. They managed to achieve that even with his lack of teaching talent. Wasn't this the perfect result? Then, why wasn't he satisfied—

"This—" Ron raised his voice. "Is this the result I really wanted?"

If so, then what were the last two months for. The second he started lamenting, he realized. His right arm wouldn't move. Was he being tied up? Wires? Since when?

He realized the irregularity too late, and couldn't counter. From the back of the sofa, countless wires appeared. His neck, legs, torso, forehead, wires spun around his body, sealing off his movement. The second he wanted to



break himself free, he saw a gun muzzle pointed at him. He was surrounded by guns, as girls appeared from behind the furniture—

A white-haired and black-haired girl pointed guns at him to his left and right, a brown-haired girl aimed for his legs, whilst a red-haired girl had his heart in her sights. An ashen-pink-haired girl looked like she was enjoying herself, whilst a bluish-silver haired girl watched every move of Ron. Since he couldn't see the blonde-haired girl Elna, she must have been hiding behind the sofa.

"At last, we finally captured you!"

Finally, the last girl appeared—the silver-haired Lily didn't do anything particular, but she still looked arrogant as she stood in front of Ron.

"You girls...weren't you supposed to have gone back to your schools..."

"That was just acting." The girl announced completely nonchalantly.

Did they have a change of heart? For these past few days, according to Ron's request, they've been packing things in order to return to their respective educational institutions. They even held a final party to celebrate their disbanding.

"Fufu, we finally won against you. Now you have to listen to our demands!"

"Demand?"

"Isn't that obvious? We want to continue as [Tomoshihi]." Lily announced.

Ron wanted to tilt his head in confusion, but the wires didn't allow him to.

"Why...? That is the exact opposite of what you wanted at our first encounter..."

"Yes, Lily-chan is the exact opposite of what she was during our first encounter." The girl made a peace-sign in front of her face.

After that, she had her two index fingers stand, as she explained.

"You see, we've had a talk~ Rather than graduating from the educational institution, being divided up, and forced to join some random spy teams, staying with the members we've survived this long with was much better."

"That is true, but..."

Ron was pushed down by Lily's forceful attitude, and happened to nod along. It's not like he couldn't grasp where she was coming from, but there were still parts of it which didn't make sense.

"...What is the reason you couldn't just tell me that normally, and had to tie me up, guns pointed at me?"

"It's a continuation of our classes."

"The classes have already ended."

"Then, it's revenge."

"You really have quite the horrible personality."

Though this could turn into a good weapon as a spy, her trait was a bit too strong. At the same time, Lily showed a confident smile, and continued.

"Hehe, no need for that face. Right now, we even have a hostage."

"A hostage?"

"Look below you."

The white-haired softened the grip on one wire for a second, allowing Ron to look beneath the sofa. There, he spotted the canvas, which should have been standing safely in his room. If Ron would move for even a bit, he would run the risk of stepping over it.

"It's the picture you've been working on this entire time, Sensei. It'd be a shame if it got ruined now."

"What a fiendish measure."

"We've become stronger, right? And it's thanks to a certain someone." Lily reached out with her hand towards him. "Please, teach us more. Help us, failures who were for nothing, to bloom beautifully."

Following Lily's words, the other girls spoke up.

"Your lessons showed the best results after all."

"The great me agrees!"

"Thanks to Sensei, Elna has become one step closer to her dream."

"Having someone from the [Homura] I've always admired is ideal for me."

—And so on. Every single girl showed how deep and profound her trust towards Ron was. To that, Ron remembered Guido's last request.

[You have to protect them. This time, for sure]

With these words, a final breath had left his mouth. Ron accepted this request, and decided to send the girls as far away as possible from any mission such as this one. He hoped to protect them by sending them back to the educational institutions. That being said, right now, he realized he was wrong. He could teach them the countless skills and traits slumbering inside of himself. He could watch them as they continue to grow. Even if he couldn't teach them directly, he was still a teacher to them. What kind of decision should he take now—

"Now, Sensei! Will you finally surrender?" Lily grew arrogant. "Announce the continuation of [Tomoshihi], announce your defeat, and suffer for all the troubles we had to—"

"By the way—" Ron opened his mouth. "How long do I have to play along?" He broke the restriction placed upon him with raw force. Using the moment the girls had their guard down the most, he pulled away the wires. The formation of the girls broke up, as the wires pulled them down to the ground. As for the guns—though they probably didn't hold any actual ammunition—were left unused as well, as they were wrapped in the wires. Though it wasn't a preferable measure of Ron's, he had to resort to it this time.

Hence, the girls were surprised at this. They weren't alarmed enough. Stepping on the canvas, he blocked every possible action of them. They were still lacking experience. But, they had enough time to work on that now.

"S-Sensei, you would even trample on your precious painting?!"

"I just stopped being too attached to the past." He spit out.

Of course, his desire for revenge would certainly not disappear much easily. But, he found a different way. After his revenge, what he felt was nothing more than sadness, seeing the empty home.

“You are still no enemy for me.” Ron announced.

They weren’t worthy of being his enemies. He didn’t think they could ever really become a worthy enemy. But, if there was a different existence he could refer them as to—

Life is always filled with the unexpected. Through working on the revenge for his comrades, he gained new allies. Ron picked up the torn picture, and tore off a part of the dried paint. As he spotted a white space at the walls of the reception hall, he put the parts he had ripped off on there, drawing one red, thin, fleeting, and yet strong line. With this, it was completed, and he compared the two paintings.

One of them, overflowing with crimson red, with the name tag [Family] on it—a painting burning strong like a blaze<sup>3</sup>.

The other one, the newly drawn painting—a painting looking like a still weakly-burning torch<sup>4</sup>.

“Marvelous—” Ron smiled.

He just had to find a new title for this painting. The room he had once spent his days in with his family was now decorated by the painting he had formed with his new allies.

1 Crimson Kiln

2 Serpent

3 Homura

4 Tomoshibi

# Afterword

Good day, I am Takemachi, the winner of the 32nd Fantasia Bunko Light Novel contest's [Grand Prize]. The work I submitted was originally called 'A spy is easily seduced. By a group of school beauties'. From there on, we revised a lot, and thus we have this finalized volume.

On a side note, the differences between the outline I submitted for the entry, and the one for this version are the result of a talk with the editor responsible for me. We talked about the strong and weak points of the submitted novel, and fixed it so that it can uphold the expectations of the [Grand Prize]. And for those who worry about using this as reference to equally apply for the next Light Novel contest, do not fret. I was neither poisoned, nor threatened by the editorial department. I did however get treated to some delicious coffee, and gently persuaded. For those who are interested, feel free to take a look at the Fantasia Bunko homepage. There, you can find the original, and how hard we have worked to improve upon it. Mostly, my editor though.

Finally, my thanks.

My wonderful illustrator Tomari-sensei. The design of the appearing characters are beautiful, thank you very much for that. I have to say, I really enjoy Ron the most for his cool looks. Even the girls, who didn't work all too much this time around have charming designs, so I'll have them work lots in the next volume.

Next, Asaura-sensei, who has greatly contributed to the designs of the arms used. Being rather poorly informed about weapons in general, I was given great advice, so I have nothing but gratitude. But, I will also work to improve my knowledge on my own.

Finally, everyone from the selection committee of this Fantasia Bunko Light Novel contest, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for granting me this prize. As mentioned, the final version turned out quite a bit different from the originally submitted work, but thanks to this, we have made immense improvements.

Finally, my thanks to all the readers. With the 'spy' genre being rather underrepresented, I want to thank you for picking up this book nonetheless. The continuation will follow rather soon from what I believe, so I hope for your continued support.

Until next time,

Takemachi